

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

[125]



BY

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APOSTOLIC LIFE,

AS REVEALED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

VOLUME III.

NEW YORK:
FUNK & WAGNALLS, PUBLISHERS,
18 AND 20 ASTOR PLACE.

1887.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1885, by
FUNK & WAGNALLS,
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TO

HENRY HUDSTON, Esq.,

“A SUCCOURER OF MANY,

AND OF

MYSELF ALSO.”

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APOSTOLIC LIFE;

AS DELINEATED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LXXIV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy house is full of light. There is morning in the tabernacles of the Most High—cloudless morning—dewy morning. Here our souls listen to music from above, and here our hearts are quieted with a holy peace. There is no house like thine ; it is the soul's great home ; there is enough to feed us in our hunger and to quench our hearts' burning thirst. Here we have all things. We have all things here in Christ. This is the place of unveiling, so that we see almost the Invisible. Our souls are touched with high amazement as they look out into the shining beyond. We see across the river. We behold pinnacles glittering in the light of a higher sun. In the wind we catch tones of other voices, known, yet unknown, the old voices with new power, the old friends risen into nobler stature. We see heaven opened ; we see the connecting ladder ; we see the descending and climbing angels, and we know of a truth that thy creation is large—yea, to our imagining, infinite. The heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee ; but thou wilt rest in the broken heart. Thou dost affright us sometimes, but only to comfort us with tenderer consolations. When thy judgments are abroad, men look towards the heavens who never looked in that direction in the time of bountiful harvest and quiet winds. When thou dost shake the rod of thy lightning over the heads of the people, they are quiet, they are dumb. Thou dost now and again show us our littleness and our helplessness ; thou dost drive us before the furious storm, and we cry for rest. We bless thee for such chastening ; it brings us to our knees ; it lays us low in the lowest dust, and makes us hope for a protection we have so often disbelieved. Then thou dost comfort us in Christ thy Son with tender mercy, thou dost draw us near to thy heart. Thy love is the greater because of the tempest ; the sky is bluer because of the infinite gloom which made it frown. Thou dost lift us up, gather us to thyself, fold us within the almightiness of thy love, and then send us forth again to do our work

in Christ our Saviour, with renewed power, and with rekindled love. We bless thee that the storm has left us alive. But a handful of hours ago, and there was no spirit in us ; but thy sanctuary was at hand ; we saw its gates ajar ; we yearned for their full opening that we might enter in and feel the sweet security of home. Thou wast a sanctuary in the tempest and a pavilion in the wilderness of desolation. Thou canst find honey among the rocks, and thou knowest where the wine and the oil and the milk abound, when in our hearts there is no hope. We will love thee more, thou Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will always come to thee by the only way. We will not fret ourselves into vexation, and sting ourselves with cruel disappointment by seeking to climb the heavens by a way of our own. We will come to the cross ; we will follow the path made red by blood ; we will look up through the wounded Son of God and find the reconciled Father. Thus will we come, and as we come the way widens, the road brightens, the whole pathway is crowded with joyous companionships, and great and abundant is the entrance which thou dost grant to those who come by the appointed way. Our sins, which are many, thou canst with a word forgive ; our disease, which is vital, thou canst with a smile heal for ever more ; our helplessness, which is complete, thou canst turn into enduring strength by the blessing of thy right hand. Thou knowest us wholly. Blessed be God, thine eye searches into all things. Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust ; thou art pitiful to us ; thou dost apportion the burden according to the strength. Make our houses glad with new lights every day. Surprise us by new brightnesses of the old sun. Show us some new writing amid the flowers with which we are most familiar ; and as for the odours which we love, send amongst them the fragrance of the better land. Rock the cradle, and the little one will sleep well. Make our bed, and we shall forget our affliction in slumber. Fasten our door, and we shall be left without anxiety. Spread our table. Find for us a staff. Comfort us in the dreary time, and bring us, life's journey through, pilgrims glad to be at home, welcomed by old comrades and by angels now unknown. Then may our education begin in the higher light, and in the wider spaces. May our worship be then profounder, truer, tenderer ; and remembering the little earth and its temporary tents, its transient joys and symbolic pleasures, may we thank God for all the little happinesses of the road, and find them in their infinite fruition in the heavens of thy light and peace. We say our prayer upon our knees ; we put out our hands and clasp the sacred Cross ; we know that we have not a moment to wait, for whilst we are yet speaking thine answer is in our hearts. Amen.

Acts xx. 1-6.

1. And after the uproar had ceased, Paul having sent for the disciples and exhorted them, took leave of them, and departed [according to his previous determination, xix. 21] for to go into Macedonia.

2. And when he had gone through those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece [xix. 21, "Achaia," *i.e.*, *Corinth*].

3. And when he had spent three months *there*, and a plot was laid against him by the Jews, as he was about to set sail for Syria [see xix. 21], he determined to return [to Asia] through Macedonia.

4. And there accompanied him as far as Asia Sopater [perhaps the Sospater of Rom. xvi. 21] of Berea, *the son* of Pyrrhus; and of the Thesalonians, Aristarchus, and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and of Asia, Tychicus [see Eph. vi. 21; Col. iv. 7; 2 Tim. iv. 12; Titus iii. 12], and Trophimus [xxi. 29; 2 Tim. iv. 20].

5. But these had gone before, and were waiting for us at Troas.

6. And we sailed away from Philippi [xvi. 40, Luke was left behind here] after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we tarried seven days.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

THERE does not seem to be much in this section of the Apostolic history. It is one of the sections which any lecturer would gladly omit with a view of finding something more exciting and pathetic in richer pastures. We must not, however, judge by appearances. Paul is still here, and wherever Paul is there is much of thought and action. The personality is the guarantee. Wherever you find the great man you find the great worker. Even amongst this commonplace there seems to be something unusual. Paul does nothing like any other man. Look at the variety of personal movement: Paul "embraces" the disciples—a word which hides in it the pathos of a farewell salutation. It was not a mere good-bye; there was in it no hint of meeting again on the morrow. Whatever might happen in the way of reunion would happen as a surprise, and would not come up as the fulfilment of a pledge. Paul will often now say "Farewell." He is not quite the man he was when we first made his acquaintance. Sometimes he straightens himself up into the old dignity and force, and we say, "Surely he will last many a long year yet"; but in this narrative he crouches a good deal; he sits down more than has been his wont; he is tortured with a dumb discontent. I see age creeping upon his face, and taking out of his figure and mien the youth which we once recognized.

Having "embraced" the disciples, he "departed to go into

Macedonia.” We like to go back to old places. We cannot account for this longing just to see old battlefields, the marks of old footprints. We like to see that the old flag is still flying—yea, we, strange as it may appear, like to steal away to the green grave to see if it is still there. Paul will go back to Thessalonica, to Berea—the city of readers—to Philippi, where he was lacerated and thrust into the innermost prison. Who can tell what happened in those repeated visits? At first, when we go to a place, there is nothing to speak about but that which is common to all other places; but having worked there, having made our signature there, when we return we talk over old themes as if we were discoursing upon ancient history, and we quote old sayings and ask for old friends with a tender familiarity, with a questioning that has a doubtful tone in it, lest we may be treading upon sacred ground, and lest we may be asking for the living who have been long numbered with the dead. Before asking such questions we look as if we would read the answer before we put the inquiry. We listen, if haply we may hear some word that will guide us as to the manner of our interrogation, lest by one inquiry we should rip up old wounds and tear open the deepest graves of the heart. These are the things that make life sacred and precious; these are the influences that quiet us with religious dignity, and that make life no longer a little fussy game, but a sad, pathetic, yet noble, mystery.

When Paul had gone over the old parts “he came into Greece, and there abode three months.” Some say that perhaps he did look into Athens a second time. It is not a matter of certain history, but, being in Greece, it is just possible that the Apostle looked in upon Athens once more. It was the city in which he had met with the most stubborn indifference that had ever hindered his mission. Certainly he went to Corinth, but Corinth was changed. The decree which made many exiles had been annulled, and Aquila and Priscilla, the tent-makers, the old companions, the teachers of Apollos, were no longer there. The friends are the town; the firesides are the city; the old walls are there; the old churches, the old towers; but, if the old friends are not there, we are mocked by mouldering masonry. Humanity lives in itself; man looks for man—not any man, but the friend-man, the companion-heart, the other self that completes

the identity. This feeling, properly interpreted and enlarged religiously, becomes a species of prayer. When we return to the familiar city, and go in quest of a friend, what is it but a kind of praying? If the seeking were upward instead of lateral, it would be prayer; but may we not from human instances gather hints of Divine meaning? There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother; there is a Friend immortal; Aquila and Priscilla will leave the city, will return to the native locality, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, always at home, always accessible, always with us, until the end of the world. He alone makes a right use of human mutations and social histories who finds in them incitements towards the companionship that is immortal, and the history that goes for ever forward in an ascending line. From empty places turn to the ever-abiding heavens; from the empty Corinthians let the soul go up to the metropolis of the universe, and find bread enough and to spare in the Father's house.

Paul "abode" in Greece three months. The word "abode" misleads us; a man blind and deaf and dumb might abide in a city or in a country three months. The word which should have been there in place of "abode" throbs like a pulse, quivers and palpitates with tremendous life. Paul cannot merely abide—to be is to fight, to be is to suffer, where the personality of a man like Paul is concerned. The reading ought not to be of a negative kind. The word "abode" carries with it energy, service, work, activity, according to the measure and quality of the actor. We sometimes say of one another, "What is he doing now?" We might say that of Paul within the four corners of this narrative. He is moving about a good deal; he is staying in Greece three months; he was in Troas five days; he went over old ground. But what is he doing? That we cannot always tell. Have confidence in faithful men; it is not needful that we should know all that they are doing. If you have only confidence in your friend so long as you can see every action, you deceive yourself in supposing that you have any confidence in him at all. The confidence comes in where the sight fails. It is when we do not know what men are doing, and yet are sure that they are doing much, that we show our confidence in them. What, then, has history shown that Paul was doing amidst

all this commonplace movement? Within this period Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. How easy to say this! how impossible to measure it! Paul did more within the period of this narrative—he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, and he probably wrote his great letter to the Galatians. There is a written ministry. It is beautiful to read what Luke has to say about Paul, but how infinitely better to read Paul's own words, written by his own hand or spoken by his own tongue! We do not always want to hear about a man, we long to hear the man himself; one sight of him, and we understand much that can never be explained; one utterance of his voice, and we are able to fill up gaps that vexed us by their mocking emptiness. What we would give for the writing of some men! It was better that Christ should write nothing: there he stands out as always, the one exception to the common rule. To have written something would have belittled Christ; he is the Word—the Living Word, the spoken Word, the mystery of Being. He wrote in the dust, and the common footprint obliterated the marvellous hieroglyphics; but he spoke, and spoke to every heart, so that every heart knows just what he said much better than if it had been put down in so many measurable lines and words. We know the words of Christ. Quote something that is not Christ's, that is opposed to the Spirit of Christ, and the heart casts it out. Sometimes the apostles quote something that is not in the Gospels, and yet we instantly feel that it ought to have been in the Gospels, that it belongs to the Gospels, that it is a marble worthy of the temple. Take an instance: "Ye remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." The words are not found amongst the recorded sayings of Jesus, but in truth he never said anything else; that was the *one* thing he did say; that was the one thing he did do; he never did anything else. The quotation falls into the harmony of the massive music of his life, and belongs to it, and is at home in that alliance. The Acts of the Apostles would have been much impoverished but for the Pauline and other epistles which fill up and illustrate their highest and broadest meanings.

Not only is there great variety of personal movement, but there is in this narrative a period of waiting. Let us see once more how Paul "waits." We saw how he waited at Athens; whilst

he waited "his spirit was stirred within him." Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians which is now lost; he wished to know the effect of that letter upon the Corinthian Christians, and Titus was charged to hasten back to Troas with a report. Paul is now waiting at Troas. How did he wait? Read 2 Corinthians ii. 12, 13: "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother." That is the same spirit we found at Athens; he soon fell into restlessness. Read 2 Corinthians i. 8: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life." I thank God for those words and for that trouble. It brings Paul down amongst us; it shows that Paul was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Read 2 Corinthians xii. 7: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." These are the experiences that occurred within the limits of a narrative which at first we supposed to be but a commonplace diary. See how Paul was being educated—educated by a thorn, a goad thrust into the flesh by impatient waiting, by longing for answers that seemed never to come, by pressure of the spirit, by disappointment with time, by discontent that made the soul ill at ease. Where is the commonplace now? The narrative itself is full of gaps, but when they are filled up by Paul's own records, we find that within a framework of sentences that merely indicate locomotion we have experiences of the most intensely spiritual nature. So, men of business, among all your movements, anxieties, restlessnesses, and disappointments, who can tell what processes of education are going on? If we could read the letters you are now writing, we might find that after many a busy day's work you write messages of comfort to the bereaved and the desolate. Perhaps you may snatch a moment from the very pressure of commercial engagements to write a brief line of healing and of hope to some broken heart. We cannot tell all we are doing. There is a public life, there is a life that the neighbours can see and read and comment upon; but there is a within life, an interstitial life, that fills up all

the open lines and broken places, and only God sees that interior and solemn existence. You go amongst men as worldly, avaricious, devoted only to meanest pursuits and to commonest altars. You may have an answer to such calumny, but may not think it worth while to give it to such low-minded critics. There may be those who "cannot make you out," and "do not know how you spend half your time." They have no right to know; they were not appointed to investigate your life. What you have to do is to hold your life in trust; you are trustee, and steward, and servant, and will one day hand in your own account to the only Judge who has a right to overlook your life. Fill up your days well; do not ask human criticism to approve you; be up with the sun; work far into the darkness; seem as if you did not want to sleep; and live ever in the great Taskmaster's eye; and at the last it may be found, that whilst others could not make out your busy life, and put its days together so as to make a continuous sum total of them, you have been amongst those servants so loyal as never to waste a moment, so industrious as to have deserved the rest which follows labour. Part of the life is seen, part is unseen; part is spoken, part is written. I have nothing to do with the way in which you spend your life when I cannot follow you into all the secret investigation of your career. We have one Master; to him we stand; he is Judge. At the last it will be seen who the *sluggards* were, and who were the industrious and faithful men that turned every moment into an opportunity, and found in every day a new field for action or a new altar for sacrifice.

LXXV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may there be in us, as in thee, no darkness at all ! May Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world, reign in us ! We would love the light ; it is the robe of God. We would dwell in light, that we may see more and more of thy wonder and of thine almightiness. Fill us with the light of heaven. Men love darkness rather than light when they are in their natural state ; we would love light rather than darkness, because in thy light we see light, and walking in the day, we are made strong. Take away from us everything that is not of the nature of light. May our understanding be as a lamp that burneth ! May our heart be as a fire that cannot be put out ! May our whole character burn and gleam with the presence of God ! But this also cometh forth from the heavens ; it is not the work of our hands, nor the issue of our vain imaginations. Thou alone canst work this miracle of light. We meet thee at the Cross to see the miracle consummated. There thou dost crown thy mighty works with mightier marvels. In the Cross of Christ thou hast accomplished all miracles in one stupendous sign. For Jesus Christ, how can we bless thee ? He is a whole heaven of light and grace, sweetness and truth. He is red in his apparel. He cometh up from the eternities as a man of war to fight the great enemy of man ; he has trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him. He is glorious in strength, as he is perfect in wisdom and infinite in pitying love. In him we rest ; in him we grow ; in him we begin to be ; in him we complete our immortality. He is Alpha and Omega—the First and the Last—the Beginning and the End, and every point of the infinite line between. He is throned above all heaven. He is the Head over all things unto his Church. Not only does he give grace, but grace upon grace, like shower upon shower of pure rain from the fountains of eternity. May we, this day, be caught in the sacred baptism, and feel the holy dew falling upon us from infinite heights, but made no burden because of the hand which administers it. We have to bless thee without end, for there is no period to all the utterance of thy grace and love toward us. Were our hymn equal to thy gift, we should talk down the sun and speak through all the shining of the stars, and ask the loan of eternity in which to sing our noble psalm. We will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. Thou wilt take a word for a sign ; thou wilt receive a sigh in place of much speaking ; one throb of the loving heart thou wilt accept as a whole liturgy. We give thee our poor love. It is a stained and

ruined thing ; but if thou wilt accept so bruised an offering, we would now tremblingly lay it upon the altar of the sanctuary. Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that we love thee. Even in the hell of our sin we are groping about for the forgiving One. Even in the pit of darkness our hearts would fain turn upward to the light, and, at least, try to pray. Lord, thou knowest all things. We bless thee for a love, how feeble and staggering soever, that can appeal to thine omniscience and rest upon the infiniteness of thy knowledge. For all thy care we bless thee. When we said we would die, behold, we began to be young again at that very moment. When we were about to fall into despair, thou didst open a great door of glory into light unimaginable and heavens without measure. When we said, " This is the end," thou didst lead us to see that it was but a new beginning. There is no end in almightiness ; there is no conclusion in infinity. Were we, through Christ thy Son, partakers of thy nature, we would triumph over all things, yea, set our feet upon all difficulties and obstacles ; yea, we would glory in tribulation also, so great would be our love, so confident our faith. Now we give one another again to thee. The poorest may be the richest ; the weakest may be the strongest ; but be we what we may, with one accord we give one another into thy holy keeping. All the road is thine. Thou dost see what we ourselves cannot behold—the pathway which we make upon the great waters. The night is thine, and thou hast the key of every door hanging at thy girdle. Thou knowest where we are, what is our thought, our purpose, our supremest wish ; so we will now, taking hold of hands, touching the Cross, give one another in sacred pledge into thy keeping, for the city is well kept which thou dost watch, and the men are safe who are within the folding of thine arms. We give the old, and the young, and the poor, and the friendless, we give those who have no other joy but in thy house, who cannot go far from home, but whose Sundays are green places in life's broad desert—specially and lovingly we give these to thee. Thou canst work wonders even for them ; the way is long, the discipline high ; but they complain not, because they know that their days are in the hand of God, and the whole guiding of life is not from earth but from heaven. And if thou shouldst break in upon us during our separation, so that we cannot put the links together again quite in this shape, thou wilt take according to thy wisdom and according to thy love. Give us the resigned heart, yea, the thankful spirit. Wherein any man is setting up his house, do thou examine the foundations for him and keep the roof strong ; the rest he may do himself. Wherein any man is beginning a new business, opening an untried career, attempting unfamiliar experiments, the Lord inspire him with wisdom and comfort him with hope. Wherein any man says he will—God helping him—turn right round in the black land and try to find the way back to the light, the Lord send more than twelve legions of angels to confirm him in his sacred vow. Oh, that we may live before thee a great, rich, joyous life ! This we can do if Christ be in us the hope of glory. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! Amen.

Acts xx. 7-12.

7. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow ; and continued his speech until midnight.

8. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

9. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep : and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

10. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves ; for his life is in him.

11. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

12. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

POINTS IN PAUL'S PREACHING.

THIS was the close of a ministry. Is there anything in human relationship more pathetic than the conclusion of a spiritual intercourse and fellowship ? So many things may happen to prevent to taking up of the scattered threads, and the weaving of them into a complete fabric. Then there is no substitute for a deeply and intensely spiritual influence. Everything beside is a child's toy offered to a man's ambition ; all other things fall not only into insignificance, but into positive contempt. To be lifted clear up above the cloud and fog, and to be set for a few shining hours high in heaven's own quietness, and to hear voices not to be heard upon the earth's surface, and to be caught in thrilling prayer which tells the soul itself what it wanted to say but could not, and which by that sacred mystery turns prayer itself into an answer—what can replace that infinite quantity ? Thus we live in personal ministries. We chide ourselves and others chide us for doing so, but it is natural after all, and not wrong. Some men can speak to me and others cannot. It is precisely the same with every one of us. The very same words may be spoken, and yet they fall a few inches short of the target of the heart, because not delivered by the archer whom we love and trust. Paul is now leaving, and cannot leave. He began in the

morning, and he was so filled with the spirit of grace that he never looked at the time ; he took no note of it ; he would have destroyed it. When was love ever patient with the clock ? When did love ever turn upon the timekeeper anything but a suspicious or angry glance ? For all things seem to have a grudge against it, and to run and fly with indecent eagerness. It is difficult for Paul to close. When the whole man is in the work, he ends often but only to begin again. He talks right down to midnight, and then thinks he may as well talk till the sun comes back, for it is better to walk in the daylight than in the cold darkness. There is no long preaching so long as the thought continues. There are no long prayers so long as the heart has another desire to express. It is when we have said all that is in us that the long preaching begins. It is when we have uttered our last wish, and then begin again to enumerate the desires we have already uttered, that long prayer sets in. When was love ever quite done ? When did love ever write a letter without a postscript ? When did love ever post a letter without some sign outside that it could begin again if it had the chance ? When Jesus Christ ceased it was out of compassion to the weariness of the flesh, not because the Spirit of God had yielded its conclusion. And love-hearing is just the same as love-preaching. Give me the attention of the heart ; then you hear so much more than I say. That is the mystery of the hearing ear. It hears tones that have not uttered themselves to inattentiveness. It makes as much of the voice as of the vocable. It magnifies the hint into a revelation. Give it one dawning ray of light, and out of that it will make a whole heaven of glory. The hearers were attentive ; Paul was eloquent ; the opportunity was closing ; the ship was to sail next day, and the miracle was how to make the sun stand still until love wrote another line and put in another appeal. What long days the old churches had ! They had but one joy, and that was in doing their work. The Church now is one of a hundred other institutions. We now set our claims in a row, and one is nearly equal to the other. In early times there was only one claim—the claim of prayer, the claim of love, the claim of sacrifice. Men prosper according to the intensity of their devotedness. When preaching becomes one of a hundred other engagements, it will go down. When church-going becomes the amusement or recreation of Sunday, then it

will be compared with what was seen yesterday and what will probably be heard to-morrow. Religion will not stand up in independent uniqueness, having no rival, and putting down all envy, and reigning until all enemies are put under its feet.

How hard it is in many cases to say "Good-bye"! When was "Good-bye" said quite snappingly and briefly and with abruptness and without repetition? When a friend leaves a friend, he never says "Good-bye" less than six times! Have you noted that? He begins early, then says a little more, and then says, "Well, good-bye," and then begins again. Another object attracts his attention, a few moments more are spent, and then he says "he must go." Not he; he will turn round again without reason for the evolution. Then he will see some other object, stoop to bless some hitherto unseen little child, look eagerly at some flower which has just attracted him, and then say, "Now I must go." Not he! Even when he has gone he has not gone. He waits at the gate, he shuts it twice, but it will not easily bolt, so he opens it again to see the reason why; then he waves "Good-bye," then takes a few steps and turns round and says "Good-bye." Why this delay? Do not ask; it is the mystery of love, the secret of heart tearing itself from heart, fibres, intertwined, disentangling themselves one from the other. That, indeed, is the sweet secret of living; but for it death would be better.

But the preaching was interrupted: "And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." He was not in the congregation. I do not know exactly where he was; he was in the room, and yet not in it, as many persons are in the church building but not in the spiritual sanctuary. I do not blame Eutychus. When a man is not in the sweep and run of the great thought and the inspiring revelation, he is asleep. Well for some of us if we were now in a deep slumber! That somnolence might be set down to physical weariness, and might be forgiven, "For God knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." But there is a deadlier sleep, and we may be in that unholy slumber. How many of us now are really awake? Consider that inquiry, for there is more in it than may at first appear.

Have I not seen some of you more awake in changing money, in making bargains, in investigating claims, covenants, and obligations? Have you not a church-look and a market-place look? I want to see the eager look, the soul in the eyes; I do not want a mimicked saintliness, but your real intense self. Who ever is awake in church? It makes the heart cold with sadness to see how men strip themselves of energy and fire, and conquering enthusiasm, when they come into the church. Do not blame the little child that lays its little head upon its mother's lap and falls into a church-sleep. God bless the little sleeper! It is a beautiful oblation on the altar, is that natural sleep; but blame the soul that leaves the body in the church whilst itself goes out to turn six days' business into seven, whilst itself steals out like a cunning felon to complete what it left unfinished yesterday in the market-place. He is asleep who looks without seeing, who has but a body in the church, whilst his soul is in other places drinking forbidden wine, enjoying interdicted fruit, and will steal back so quietly as to suppose that it has deceived every observer, and got in again without ever having been missed. "Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart after thee?" There is no successful truancy from the church. We leave stealthily, but we are followed as quietly as we go, and the record is completed, though we know it not.

Then there is an immoral attention. There is a profane way of listening; there is a wakefulness that is not godly. What are men listening for? For the truth—tuneful, pure, holy truth? Then they are listening well. But if for any other thing—I care not how strained may be their attention—their listening is an oblation on the altar of selfishness, and their attention is a compliment which they are paying to the vanity of their own imagination. Who can listen? Who can be quite awake—awake all over, and answer by fire the God that answers himself in flame? Awake! awake! put on thy beautiful garments, O Zion! Let it be a Sabbath day indeed. Get out the very best robe, and let us have a whole Sabbath, a long Sabbath, a cloudless Sabbath, a beginning of heaven itself!

In this incident there are two or three little circumstances worthy of a moment's notice. "There were many lights in the upper

chamber, where the disciples were gathered together." Christianity has no dark *séances* ; Christianity has no dark meetings, no closed shutters and drawn curtains, and enforced and mysterious silencings ; Christianity is not a piece of magic. "Light the lamp," it says. "Throw back the shutters, and let the sun come in." This thing was not done in a corner. There is morality in publicity. Christianity is a mighty challenge to the attention of the universe. It only asks for silence that its speech may be heard the better. The magician wants arrangements made to suit him ; the light must be so much and no more ; the curtain must be hung thus, and not otherwise ; the ropes, and bells, and pulleys must be set in this order, and in no other. When a man makes stipulations of that kind with a view to give you a new revelation, he is going to befool you. When did Christianity ask for curtains or screens, or the aid of artificial mechanisms and adaptations ? Christianity can preach anywhere. Christianity can go up steps of glory and stand upon a floor of diamonds, or sapphire, and preach its infinite truth ; or it can go up the meanest staircase ever laid by unskilful hands, and talk with the same divine eloquence. Paul preaches as eloquently in the upper chamber to the two hundred people who are hearing him as he would preach on Mars' Hill with all the gathered and cultured hosts of Athens or of Greece. That is the test of reality always. It is enough for the preacher to see one man in the house ; he is only discouraged when there is not one soul present. Give him a soul, and you give him a universe ! He is not—being a truly ardent messenger of God—able only to preach when the church is full ; he does not see whether the church is full or not. The true preacher only sees one, but he is a host, an army, a whole heavenful or a whole hellful of human nature.

When Paul came down and stretched himself upon Eutychus, he said, "His life is in him." Christianity does not try to make a reputation for doing miracles where no miracles are to be done. What an opportunity for a magician ! The people are panic-struck ; they all believe that Eutychus is dead. Paul might say, "Yea, verily, he is stone-dead, cold through and through, and only by a mighty miracle on my part can the vitality be restored." He makes the least of the occasion. Nothing has occurred that need excite alarm, or beget for him an additional reputation.

Christianity tells no lies. Christianity is awfully stern about having the bare truth. It is so real ; it will have no covering, no false medium of observation, no adaptable standard of criticism. It will know the thing as it is, just as it is, and represent it so, and have nothing to do with manufactured statements.

Paul stopped his service to look after one injured man. In that particular he followed the example of Jesus Christ. The Saviour suspended the Sabbath day until he got the ox or the ass out of the pit. He said to the Sabbath sun, "Stand still ! Here is a work of necessity to be done—we must have time." How can men reject such a Christianity, such a philosophy of life, such a religion, so stern, so tender, so rigorous, so bland, so ready, so redeeming ? Let us say to its Author and Founder, "My Lord and my God." When did Christianity ever undervalue human nature ? When did the Divine Founder of Christianity say, "Continue the service, and never mind the man" ? On the contrary, he said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Every life is of importance to God. Eutychus was not a great man ; as his name implies, he was of the freedmen class. He and his ancestors had probably all been slaves, but he had become a freedman. He belonged to the plebeian side of life, but to God there are no plebeians, except men who never pray, never love, never do works of mercy, or perform acts of sacrifice ; they are the commonalty, the plebeians. But as for those who love him, serve him, pray to him, ask to know his will, and try in his strength to do it, though they have not bread to eat, and no pillows to lay their heads upon, they are nobles, princes, jewels, kings ; they are of the very quality of heaven.

LXXVI.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, the whole lot of our life is in thy disposal ; the bounds of our habitation are fixed, and we have not liberty but within thy purpose. We accept thy kingdom ; thy rule is full of grace, and thine intention concerning us is good only. Thou dost love us. We know thee not in relation to the other worlds. But about this little place which is our own, we know thou hast bought it with blood—the precious blood of thine only begotten Son. We do not know the meaning of this price ; we can only speak it in words, but the thought which they tell fills all heaven and calls for greater space, spreads itself over the universe, and calls the room too small. We live in thy love as in a sure dwelling-place. Our habitation is in the rocks not made with hands, and therefore by hands never to be unmade. We hasten to the house of God ; its doors are open ; its angels are calling welcome ; its banquet is spread with a liberal hand ; there is a seat for every sinner, there is a welcome to every broken heart. Surely this is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven ! We bless thee for every sacred memory, for every rising figure in the days that are gone that tells us of noble life and generous deed. We thank thee for every man who has spoken a word of deliverance to our imprisoned souls, for every hymn that has sung its sweet tune to us all the week long, from Sabbath evening to Sabbath morning back again. We praise thee for all blessings given noiselessly to the heart, as well as for all the great hospitalities and banquetings which we have enjoyed amid the noises of the thunders and the trumpets of the rejoicing skies. Thou dost make the heart rich. Thou dost not bring tears of sorrow into our eyes, but pure waters of joy, dews of heavenly grace. Thou dost not rend the heart with sharp pangs of agony, but causest it to beat with surprises of joy, with unexpected visions of light, with unlooked-for relations of the story of thy grace. How wondrous the way ! How amazing the prospect ! There seems now to be before us a glittering morning, a welcoming host, a prepared place, a waiting Saviour. May we know the meaning of the omens which challenge our religious attention, and arise like men who have to go a long way in a short time, and to answer questions which penetrate the core of the life. Regard us each as if an only child. We need to be caressed as well as recognized ; we cannot live upon thy mere look of recognition, we must be taken up into thine arms like little children, and remember that our three-score years and ten, our four-score years, are but a handful of days—less than one

little trembling moment compared with the age of God. Love us. Put thine arms around us. Look at us with the eyes of thy heart. Speak to us in the tones which the soul alone can hear. Comfort us with multiplied consolations, so that the littleness of our sorrow may be lost in the vastness of thy compassion. Tell the old man that he is yet hardly born. Show the busy man that the road which he chooses may end in death, and teach him to be busy with a right purpose, and to labour under an adequate inspiration. Speak comfortably to hearts that cannot tell all their woe. Be gentle to the weak ; be gentlest to those that have no strength. Look upon the little children as the sunlight looks upon the budding flowers. Bless them every one this day, and give each to feel that there is no weariness in the brightest house of all the habitations of men. We cannot make our own sick-beds, but thou wilt make them, or the angels shall give skill to our hands, and the sweet watching ones will show us how to do the most delicate of all beneficent tasks. There are some that are near us, and yet mile on mile away from our strongest help. They are ready to perish ; they are appointed to die. We see them, but they see not us, for their eyes are turning morning-ward to the uplands and the cities of the quiet and the pure. They are thine. We would follow them with our little prayers if we did not know that already they were hidden in the very heart of thy love. Make this day the gladdest of all Sabbaths we have ever known. Surprise us by visitations from heaven ; and wherein we think we have before seen the Cross, and felt the power of the infinite Priest who died upon it, may the revelation of his love this day eclipse every former vision, and lead us first into exclamations of delight, and then to the speechless wonder of infinite amazement. Amen.

Acts xx. 13-19.

13. But we, going before to the ship, set sail for Assos, there intending to take in Paul [twenty miles by land, much farther by sea on account of the Cape Lectum] : for so had he appointed, intending himself to go by land [G., "to walk it"].

14. And when he met us at Assos we took him in, and came to Mitylene [capital of the island Sestos].

15. And sailing from thence, we came the following day [in their coasting voyages the ancients sought out a safe anchorage for each night] over against Chios ; and the next day we touched at Samos ; and the day after we came to Miletus [twenty miles by land, *south* of Ephesus].

16. For Paul had determined to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

17. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church.

18. And when they were come to him he said unto them [*Paul's Pas-*

toral Mirror], Ye yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia after what manner I was with you all the time.

19. Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews.

ANALYSIS OF SERVICE.

LUKE and his companions "went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul." All these arrangements were under Paul's own hand; he was not minister only, but leader, inspirer, and servant as well. He was as deeply interested in the detail as if he had nothing else to attend to. He himself would walk to Assos alone. He would take the twenty miles' walk and make a religious exercise of the journey. He went along the magnificent Roman road, sheltered by the great oak forests that grew by its side. And he wanted no human companion; all the angels would walk with him; Jesus himself would draw near. There are times when human companionship becomes a burden, when we must be left alone, not always to sit, for then the mind has not full swing, but to walk; and walking is an appointed means and help of intellectual and spiritual study. The mind treasures its riches. Locomotion helps the processes of thought; locomotion alone—the city, with its din, miles away; the work yet to be done lying far ahead. The soul feels that in silence there is a sanctuary, and that in solitude there is tender companionship. Do we walk alone? Do we go out, as the prophet was commanded to go, into the field that God may talk with us awhile? Do we "meditate in the field at the eventide"?—the tired day taking its rest, the battle lulling and halting awhile, the very air calmed down into a religious hush, as if expecting some new tone from heaven. In imagination, figure Paul walking his twenty miles down to the ship, not tired of his companions, or loving them one whit the less, but conscious of a yearning after quietness—yea, even silence, and after the solitude which of necessity means prayer.

Paul came, and joined the ship, and passed on with his companions. He came in due time to Miletus. From that point he might have seen the white palaces of Ephesus; and he might have been tempted to go back to the old battle-field. Therein he knew his great weakness. It was never safe to show Paul the

marks of an old controversy, unless he had ample time to return to the situation and complete the purpose of the sacred fray. A trait of his character reveals itself in this comparatively trivial incident. "Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus . . . for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost." He had a vow to discharge, or an obligation to pay, or some hidden purpose to carry out, and therefore he felt safest on board ship. Yet he could not pass by wholly; so here the master-mind comes out again, even in this little arrangement of matters, for "Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church," who came some thirty miles to see their great teacher and bishop. He must have a few words with them just at that time, not new words, but old words spoken in new tones. We can never hope to preach a new Gospel, but we can always preach the old Gospel in a new accent; we can always drop upon it a tear that never was shed before; we can always say it with the unction of additional experience, or with the emphasis of the added confidence which comes of steadfast continuance and faithfulness in Gospel doctrine and service. It is not enough to say the Gospel has been once preached, and there is an end of it. There may be an end of the mere words, or mere form in which the truth is expressed, but there can be no end of the revelation which is made to the speaker's own heart, or to the inspiration which enables him to clothe the most familiar expressions with the witchery of a new elocution taught by the Spirit of the living God. On this ground the Gospel will never cease to be preached. There may be those who, looking only at forms, say, "We have heard that before." So much the worse for you if you have not obeyed it, and that is a criticism that you can never pass if your heart be in a right state before God. But every man has his own tone, has his own tears, has his own weird, or sharp, or telling, or soothing voice, and emphasis. So the Gospel is the same and not the same—the same with a diversity; unchangeable, yet, as a matter of practical application, changing with all the varying phases of daily pilgrimage, and taking upon itself the newness of the present necessity.

Paul is about to make his greatest speech. Intellectually he may have stood head and shoulders above his present mental stature as he stands before the elders of Ephesus. He is not going

to be intellectual now ; his heart is going to speak. Some people have failed to find a heart in Paul, and have found nothing but heart in John. Did John, or any other man, ever deliver such a speech as this episcopal charge to the overseers of the Christian Church of Ephesus? We have known Paul more argumentative, more brilliant, keen in retort, instantaneous and flashing in reply, adroit in answering unexpected assaults ; but we have never known him so grandly emotional, as if he had ordered his mere intellectual genius to stand back while his heart arose to tell what it was then able only sobbingly to say of deepest Christian experience and noblest Christian exhortation. We can find Paul in the speech. Some speeches reveal the speaker ; *that* we have already seen in our studies in this Apostolic story. Pre-eminently this is the case in Paul's speech to the elders. It was not a speech delivered to a great multitude ; it was not delivered in a high tone of voice, as if announcing new truths to multitudes of unaccustomed ears and strange hearers. The speech might have been spoken in an undertone. It falls into a kind of minor key ; it is plaintive, pleading, tremulous, not with weakness, but with strength that wants to be stronger. Here is the Apostle Paul. If any man wishes to know what Paul was, he can find the whole man in these pathetic sentences. Listen to the now veteran speaker—veteran in service if not in age : “ Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons.” Paul lived a public life. That is the most difficult life of all to lead. People only see parts of it. There are great breaks and chasms which separate one part from another, and the public, unable to understand such gaps, are apt to make out an accusation of inconsistency where, under other circumstances, they would see the most massive and noble harmony. Paul was able to appeal to the life he had led. Paul was a great preacher, because he was a great man. It is in that direction that all great preaching must come. Enlarge the preacher if you would enlarge the sermon. Nourish the man, give him wider teaching, larger experience of life, deeper and tenderer familiarity with all the sufferings of the people as well as with all the thoughts of the elect and leading few, and in proportion as you increase manhood generally will you increase preaching power in particular. Paul calls attention to his manner of life, not to his sermons

only, not to particularly-prepared utterances, by which he said he was now ready to abide, but he says, "Look at the whole life; you have seen it; I have been no stranger amongst you; I am willing to be judged by that life." There is no reply to such reasoning. Sometimes a man's reasoning is better than a man's conduct. In the case of Paul the conduct was the reasoning, the reasoning was the conduct. He was a whole man, and challenged attention, not to sections of his character, but to his whole personality and ministry. Notice how he does this. He refers to "all seasons." He was not going to be judged in separate or unrelated details; he would be taken for all in all. The hill and the dale, the wood and the water, make up the landscape. So Paul would not be judged by preaching only, or by suffering, or by quickly-spoken words, or by personal controversies, as with Barnabas or Peter; he would be judged in the totality of his purpose and action. Will it not be so at the last? Will not the Judge of all the earth repeat this judgment in his final criticism of every one of us? We judge a man a day at a time; to-day we cry, Hosanna! because he pleases us; to-morrow we crucify him, because he has excited our momentary anger; on some other occasion we vary our judgment because of some immediate and vexatious detail. But life is not a question of single days; you must judge the supreme purpose of a man, and so judged, some of us will be better than we have ever been accounted to be, and some may be much worse. We must take in the "all seasons," the ever-changing variety of circumstances attendant upon human development, and we must leave to God the final and complete judgment, because He knows what we have done, what we have resisted, what we would have done if we could. He will connect our prayers with our service, our aspirations with our attempts, our ambitions with our endeavours, and within the continual tumult of contradictions he will find the real man, and crown him, or sentence him to a great distance from the light.

Paul says he has served "the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell him by the lying in wait of the Jews." Some people would call this egotism, or self-praise. There are two egotisms—the little egotism that thinks about itself; and the unconscious and heroic egotism which never thinks about itself, even whilst apparently speaking

only in its own name. Just as there are two prudences—the little prudence that attends only to little things, but misses the great ones ; and the all but infinite prudence which forecasts totalities and upsumming, and is apparently negligent on some occasions which take upon themselves exaggerated importance because of their nearness. Paul was never egotistic, yet he was never ashamed of his own personality. “With all humility of mind” —that is the root of spiritual genius. Trust the humble mind for finding out God’s meaning. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will show them his covenant.” “The meek will he guide in judgment,” “but the proud he knoweth afar off.” Where there is humbleness of soul there is great expository power. There may be little knowledge of mere words and phrases, etymologies and formalities of speech, but I will trust the humble mind, the broken heart, to go in unto God’s dwelling-place and bring me a hot coal from off God’s altar which the dainty fingers of the intellectually-proud could never touch. If we were better men, we would be better students ; if we were humbler, we would be more learned ; if we were less, we would be more ; if we were broken-hearted—lost in rivers of self-accusation and contrition—we should have greater knowledge of the inner mysteries and spiritual meanings of the living God, who is the Saviour of all men.

“With many tears.” Tears are good readers. They may stumble over the letter, but they have great skill in seeing the spirit. We see most when our eyes are shut, so our hearts see most when they have no eyes but tears. A ministry baptized with tears must help us : without the tears it might be brilliant or stern, or inspiring, or majestic ; but with the tears it stoops, it lovingly condescends. It says to the sinning man, “I know all about your sin, and I can show you how to get rid of it, every whit.” It comes down amongst the people, and speaks to their immediate life, and shows the worst how he may be better ; and the best, how he may improve what he thought was approaching perfection, and crown with superlative glory that which he has already built up with a strong and industrious hand. Let us have ministers who can sympathize ; let us have ministers who can cry with their hearts. We shall then find that true rhetoric is logic well spoken, that the highest argument is clothed with the

supremest tenderness, and that the man who stands upon rocky heights speaking great words of might can also come down to pray by the cradle's side, and plant the flowers of intercession around the edge of the open tomb.

“And many temptations.” This is quite an outline of ministerial education! The word “temptations” may mean trials, agonies, provocations, allurements in the other direction. The word may mean an appeal to the merely carnal feelings to have nothing more to do with men who will shut their ears against heaven's music, and turn away from the appeals of Calvary. An untempted minister will never do us any good; an untried man will talk over our heads. My great preacher must be a man who has carried heavier chains than I have strength to bear, who has fought lions the very shadow of which would be too much for me to look upon. He must preach more as one who can say, “I have fought a severer fight than you are fighting; I know the devil better than you know him; I have been a mile farther in the pits of hell than you have ever gone; and now, my brother,—crushed, bruised, nearly gone,—you and I must, in God's sight and in God's strength, fight out this whole thing, and in the strength and grace of the Cross get back again the manhood we have lost.” To speak so is to be sure of a good hearing, for the poor, self-denouncing, self-distressing heart knows the voice of experience, and instantly answers a voice that has in it the tone of a deep practical learning, and yet that trembles with the mystery of sympathy.

These temptations befell Paul “by the lying in wait of the Jews.” He calls them by that strange name! They were his countrymen, but they were no longer his kinsmen. We make strange changes in the relationships of life. They, who were his own nation, his own kindred according to the flesh, now, after this Christian experience, stand back from him, strangers, aliens, unknown, heathen men. Such separations may take place amongst ourselves. There is a time when prayer itself expires, when spiritual wrestling ceases, when the teacher will teach no more in that direction, because he is speaking unto the unanswering night, and getting back nothing from the land of darkness. There may come a time when our kinsfolk will be strangers, when our familiar acquaintances will be aliens, when children of the

same mother will not know one another's voices, and when the only relationship that can be acknowledged as vital and permanent will be a relationship founded upon position in the great commonwealth of Christian faith. Everything went down before Christianity in the experience of Paul ; he became impatient with every claim that was not founded upon the Cross. As the day died in shadows around him, he would acknowledge no household but the household of faith, and he would have nothing to say to any man except in reply to that man's earnestness about sin, salvation, and the destiny of the soul.

Here we must stop. We must often meet around this great charge, study almost its every letter, and get its music so much into our souls as to feel as if we ourselves had been there and heard the mighty speaker as he enthralled the attention and entranced the heart of the elders of Ephesus.

LXXVII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would be swallowed up of love ; we would be lifted up far beyond the earth and sense of time, and begin already to know somewhat of the tender mystery of eternal peace. Why this longing of the heart ? Why this discontent with time and sense ? This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Thou dost make us miracles unto ourselves. Thou dost write strange writing upon our heart and mind, and cause us to be sorely puzzled by its great meaning. Thou hast made man a revelation of God. Surely we may say, This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, when we feel this sacred pressure after things not seen and eternal. This desire is no invention of ours ; this longing after immortality is no earth-born inspiration. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, wondrous in counsel and excellent in working. We know that we are made after the image and likeness of God when we thirst for the Living God as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. We bless thee that all our questionings are answered by Jesus Christ, and that the gracious replies are written in his own blood as he dies upon the tree. Jesus Christ thou hast made our Saviour. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, that we might know release from sin, the pardon of guilt, and enter into the joy of our Lord. This mystery of love is our delight : we feel its sublimity ; we respond to its infinite grandeur ; we see the heavenly wisdom and the heavenly righteousness in the sacred Cross, and, being enabled to exercise faith in Christ Jesus, we now feel upon our awakening souls the tender, morning light of a land in which there is no death. Thou dost love us every one. Thy heart stands open like a great door night and day, and into it we may run and find love and safety, and assurance of adoption into thy family. This is the salvation that cometh down from above ; there is no strain in its overflowing strength ; there is no effort in its omnipotence ; there is no endeavour simply to cover the extremity of our guilt ; it is an abounding salvation, an overflowing grace, a redundant and infinite compassion and love. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Who can overtake thy love ? What sin can equal thy grace ? Is not the great hell itself but a tiny spark in the infinite amplitude of thy radiant kingdom ? Thou, O Christ, shalt reign over all hearts. The universe is thine in every light and shadow, and surely thou wilt have it all by right of ownership, or by right of redemption. Thy sceptre is an everlasting sceptre, and thy throne is for ever and ever.

Every week we grow downwards and away from the light, because of the continual action of time upon us ; but on the Lord's Day are we not lifted up into newness of life, taken away to the tops of exceeding high mountains, whence we can see what lies beyond of beauty and life and comfort? May we thus from week to week make steady advance in upward paths, until dying shall be living, until the farewell to one world shall be the salutation of the next. We lay our sins before the Cross and see them melting away. We speak our contrite speech into the ear of Christ, and whilst we are talking to him in heart-brokenness and penitence, all the old light returns, and the assurance of adopting love is given again, so that we, who but yesterday were the bondsmen of our own guilt, are to-day the freemen of Christ's love. We give one another to thee—friend prays for friend. Some have been surprised by great goodness ; they have suddenly seen the angel of the Lord, and are glad ; they knew not what to do with the chain until the angel touched it and the iron melted away. Some have seen light springing up in darkness. There was to them no earth, no sky, no beyond—only an all-enclosing and all-burdening darkness ; and lo, suddenly, as the midnight hour paled, there struck through the darkness a gleam of light from heaven, and there was daylight in the very centre of the cloud. And some are still dejected of heart ; their eyes are red with crying, and their limbs fail for want of strength. They are always with us ; we commend them to the great Friend and Healer of men—the honest worker, who is baffled at every turn ; the heroic woman-heart that wants to do so much, but has no chance to do it ; the brave soul that wants to be free and yet must live in servitude ; the perplexed ; the disappointed ; the secretly sorrowing ; those who are praying in whispers because they would be ashamed to be overheard, so halting and poor their prayer—we commend to thee for recognition, deliverance, and comfort, and pray that they may receive, according to their necessity and their pain, the great gift of the grace of God. Let this morning be a time of gladness to us ; may hearts melt ; may stubborn wills yield ; may those who have hitherto been deaf hear for the first time Gospel music, and may all the appeals of heaven, made through the Cross of Christ, through the blood and priesthood of Christ, be answered by the whole congregation in dedicated hearts, in lives laid on the altar, with the only regret that the oblation is not complete. Amen.

Acts xx. 20-23.

20. How that I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable [cause of above tears and trials], and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

21. Testifying both to Jews, and to Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

22. And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there :

23. Save that the Holy Ghost testifieth unto me in every city [xiii. 2 ; xxi. 4-11], saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

THE MAN AND THE DOCTRINE.

PAUL considered his hearers ; he acted as a wise physician ; so far as was possible he studied each individual case and gave to each a portion of meat in due season. There are great public utterances to be made, and there are private interpretations, or secret comforts, or individual messages to be attended to. Paul considered the hearer : he seemed to say about every one, " What does this particular man most need ? what is his peculiar temperament ? what are his peculiar temptations ? I must study every man as if he were the only man, and thus minister the word of grace according to the singular characteristic and special necessity of each living soul." We know that to be impossible in detail ; yet are we charmed by the loving and helpful spirit that would so study each case if it could. This Gospel is not to be roughly delivered, with want of discrimination as to particular soul-conditions and soul-developments. What the Gospel would do is to speak to every soul as if it were the solitary occupant of the universe—the one creature in the presence of the Creator. This kind of secret ministry, concentrated upon the one soul, comes out of continuous and devout reading of the Holy Book in the solitude of our own companionship. It is then we see the brightest gleams of heavenly light ; it is then we feel the nearness to a Spirit that has no name adequate to the mystery of its operation, but which we signalize by temporary names for the purpose of assisting our recollection and fixing in our hearts great spiritual occurrences. Each preacher can consider his own congregation where he cannot consider each member of it. All congregations are not alike ; what would be suitable to one congregation might be unsuitable to another. Where the congregation is composed of all classes and conditions of men, and in no small degree of men who are inquiring, of men who are religiously numbered with nobody, who are wondering, speculating, often sinning, often curiously praying—saying words unfamiliar to Christian atmos-

pheres ; rugged men ; daring men ; men who are better often than they seem ; men who try to laugh off their religion when they are feeling it most poignantly—then we must have a ministry adapted to such peculiarities, and overspreading them all with something like infinite sympathy and compassionateness, so that every soul may feel as if the preacher had no acquaintance but himself. This is the gift of God. The ruthless preacher who treats every soul alike will have no souls deeply attached to him. He who makes great allowances, who enlarges the church door to admit those for whom it would otherwise be too strait, may seem to be liberal, but his liberality is only in seeming, for no liberality can equal the love which has made all the firmament a great shining door that swings back at the penitential touch to allow the penitent to enter into his Father's house. If there is not room for man in the Church of God, there is room for him nowhere. The largest house in the universe is God's house ; he never adds to the building, but he continually points out the mansions we, ourselves, had not yet discovered. There is no human case that is not considered by the Gospel, and provided for by the Gospel. I care not how strange the case, how vivid its peculiarities, how repellant some of its features, how crying and bitter its moral agony—there is provision for it in the great Gospel scheme, the sweet Gospel thought that cares as much for the little as for the great, for the poor as for the rich ; nay, before it there can be no littleness, no greatness, no poverty, no wealth—all these distinctions are lost in the infiniteness of its own sublimity. So let no man stand outside the gate of heaven and say that he was not foreseen when the boundaries of heaven were established.

In recounting his ministry, Paul said, " I have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house." One would like a record of his house-to-house talk, but the scribes have done little for us beyond tracing the main, broad outline of the Apostolic ministry. To have heard Paul speak on great themes in a little sphere would have been an education. What child has not been fascinated by seeing what appeared to be the whole sun inside a frail dewdrop ? And what traveller has not paused a moment to see some kind star condescending enough to hide itself in the depth of a crystal well, as if it were shining in two heavens at once ? To have seen Paul at the fireside, or to

have heard him talking to some little child, or to have watched him at some bedside near the dying sufferer—to have heard his voice when it was attuned to the hearing of one listener alone ! These opportunities we can never enjoy. We do not always get the full man even in the elaborate biography which has been written of him. When we have read all the biographer can say, perhaps in some stray letter which was never intended to be published we may find one little sentence which will throw more light upon the man's character than the whole biography has thrown. Men are seen in little things, on small occasions ; in one stoop to the ground we may get a better gauge of the condescension of the spirit than in more elaborate humility. So the Paul that is before us is only treading great broad lines—we want the house-to-house-preaching Apostle. Blessed be God, this great Gospel will go anywhere, and be just the same whether drawn on a large scale or a little one ; it does not hide itself until an adequate theatre is prepared for its display ; it is not a scenic Gospel ; it is not part of some grand thing that has to be done by a large number of persons. It will preach under great roofs with modulated thunder which fills the house and makes every ear glad with its tunefulness, and it will be just as fascinating and thrilling when it drops its voice into a whispered prayer—gently insinuating doctrine to the listener as well as enlarging into copious prayer, special intercession for his comfort and illumination. The Apostle Paul could discharge both ministries. There is only one Apostle Paul. Do not be discouraged because you can only discharge a public ministry ; and do not you be discouraged, rural pastor, or city shepherd, because you can only discharge the house-to-house ministry. The one ministry may be as important as the other, but do not expect that, taking ministers as a body, every one can be the same in public as in private, in private as in public. Each man has his own gift of God. Happy he who works his own gift and not another man's, and wise the people who, recognizing the one gift, do not bemoan the absence of other accomplishments.

What did the Apostle say both “ publicly and from house to house ” ? The same great doctrine he preached in both cases. This you find in the 21st verse : “ Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward

our Lord Jesus Christ." That was the grand substantial doctrine ; of how many modifications it admits only those who have gone carefully into its study and application can tell. This doctrine never changes ; this holy substance can never be taken out of the volume. Why should we be unwilling if scholars rearrange the order of the Biblical books ? Why should we moan if they correct our notions as to the chronology of the succession of the prophets ? Why should we feel that the foundations are out of course because a complete and intelligent scholarship brings new light to bear upon old constructions ? The one thing that cannot be changed is the message which the Gospel has to deliver to the human heart, and that message cannot be expressed in more symbolic and significant terms than "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Who has ventured to change the terms ? If your religion rested upon other foundations, I wonder not that it has been much troubled by modern scholarship and by contemporary challenge and assault, but if your religion finds its foundations in the 21st verse—"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"—it cannot be touched. Where is there a heart that can say in its most serious moments that it has no need of repentance ? Do not let us appeal to the flippant man upon this subject, but to the man who knows life, who has felt its temptations and its pressures of every kind. No such man will ever say that he lives beyond the necessity of repentance. He could detain you all day by a recital of his shortcomings and his sins. That he is dumb about them shows not the littleness of the list, but its endlessness. Why begin what can never be finished ? Why not express by a bowed head what never can be uttered in the most elaborate confession ? What man is there that does not feel, under the pressure of his own guilty memories, that he needs a help other than his own ? He has no hand with which he can help himself, for his hand, as well as his head, is involved in the terrific and fatal paralysis. He cannot open an eye to see his way, for on his eyelids rests the accumulated darkness of self-accusation. If that man has to be delivered, he must be delivered by another hand than his own, and that action is best represented by the words "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet the faith is not in the man, but in the Christ ; but Christ works so mysteriously as to make us creditors

in the matter of the faith, and says in the end, when the soul is delivered, and whitened with the purity of heaven, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." Yet faith is the gift of God ; faith is the communication of God ; faith is no merely human faculty, yet it pleases God, who wants to make more of us than we are if he can, to say that our faith hath made us whole. "Repentance" is a word which may be broken up according to the sinfulness of the individual sinner. Some men can never know the agony of repentance without great demonstration of feeling. Other souls pass through the same agony, but the observer is not allowed to trace the sacred pain. The repentance does not consist in the public demonstration, but in the inward and spiritual feeling. God must judge whether my repentance is sincere.

Having laid down some outline of his manner of life and doctrine, the Apostle comes to a point of departure. "And now," said he, "behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there : save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." It was a dark outlook ; how is the darkness relieved ? In this case as in all others : by an immediate and definite reference to Divine providence. "I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem." This is destiny ; some men would call it Fate. "I move because I cannot help it, except in a sense which would involve positive and profane disobedience. To turn the other way would be to turn from myself, from my convictions, from a distinct and solemn conception of personal destiny." When a man lives in this doctrine, he may go forward into darkness, but he goes forward with a solid and solemn step. If you think that the cloud that is before you is of your own creation, you may well be dejected as you look upon its magnitude and density ; but if you can say, "This also is part of the school discipline of God ; this great breadth of darkness must be traversed inch by inch ; this land of graves must be travelled over mile by mile ; this wilderness of sand is the creation of a Providence that means by it my spiritual culture and noblest education," you will advance without laughter, but with a solemn joy, a grand, deep joy, full of melancholy, full of expectation : not a discipline undergone because the imposer of it is stronger than you are, but undergone with solemn cheerfulness because of the conscious assurance of

your own heart that every stroke is meant for your good, and every loss is a contribution to your gain.

Not one ray of hope in all the outlook! "In every city—bonds—afflictions." No friend in any city; bound when I have done nothing worthy of bonds; afflictions heaped upon a man who ought to be hailed with hallelujahs and acclaims of thankfulness. Yes. What a tribute to the sustaining power of the doctrine he had taught! No man can "go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem" to face "bonds and afflictions in every city" merely for the sake of bearing such accumulated griefs and distresses. That were but a temporary bravado. That were an unremunerative sentiment that would soon be chastised and scourged out of a man. The bonds were many, the afflictions were heavy; what outweighed them all? The sense of God's presence and God's favor. The spiritual can outweigh the material. You can be in such a state of soul-wealth as to forget the poverty of earth and time; you can be so fed in the very soul as to be forty days and forty nights without food or lodging, and not to know that you have not been all the time in heaven. If one thing above another has been demonstrated by Christian history, it is that the Christian spirit may be so vital in a man as to make him forget all care and pain and labour and sorrow, and make him triumph and glory in tribulation also. Such feelings are not to be dismissed by being ascribed to fanaticism. We have had ample opportunity of judging the character of a man like the Apostle Paul, and we have always been bound to admit, however great his excellency, however high above us his spiritual ecstasy, he has shown an intellectual capacity, a mental sternness, a grip and force of mind that have compelled the admiration of those who have sometimes wondered about, if not questioned, his divine inspiration. What comforted Paul will comfort us. This is the eternal quantity of the Gospel—never changing, never lessening. There are amongst us men who can rise in the Church to-day and say, "But for the grace of God, I would not have been a living man this day"; "But for the grace of God, I should have been the victim or the dupe of temporary, but uncontrollable, insanity"; "But for the grace of God, this day my life would have been sunk in despair." The men who would render such testimonies are men whose intellectual sagacity has been tested and proved in the market-place,

in the realm of politics, along the lines of ordinary social life. There is no dispute about their mental soundness, and yet, with ardour and emphasis and gratitude, they can make this testimony about the sustaining and comforting power of the grace of God. I have buried the child of a man who had no consciousness of God, no realization of the presence of Christ in his life, and I have seen that man reel back from his child's open grave mad with hopeless grief. I have also buried the child of parents who have lived in God, who have loved the Saviour, and humbly endeavoured to serve him, and as the little coffin has been let down and the farewell words have been spoken, they have been enabled to say, "It is well with the child." Be that religion mine! Let me live the life of the Christian; let me die the death of the righteous; let me, when pressed into close quarters, thrust upon by every spear in the armoury of the enemy, be able to say, "Into thy hands, Lord Jesus, I commend my spirit." In such extremities we find out the value of man's religion. In cloud, in storm, in rough wind, in bare upland, in hot wilderness, in death's own black night we find out what men's faith really is; and tested by those tremendous tests, the faith of our Lord Jesus stands up this day the only faith that has sustained intelligent men, reason-loving men, all kinds and conditions of men—the faith that took them to the one end of the valley of the shadow of death, and never left them till it introduced them into the light at the other end, and received them from the waving hand of the delivered one—a tribute to a constancy that never failed, and to a grace that was always more than equal to the agony of the occasion.

LXXVIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art ever warning us. Our whole life is a warning of its own uncertainty and assured brevity. Give us understanding of these things, that we waste not golden hours. In the midst of life we are in death. Our house is built over our grave. Oh that men were wise, that they knew these things, that they would consider their latter end. Every day may be our last. Teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom ; yet give us triumph in Christ Jesus over all fear. May we not be subject to bondage all our lifetime through fear of death. May the coming end be unto us as a new beginning. Show us that we are now in preparation for better things ; yea, show us that what we have already seen is but the dim symbol of the infinite brightness. So may we live under inspiring hopes, knowing that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Enable us, by living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, now to enter into the realization of eternal joy. By the power of an endless life, may we do the little work of the passing day. Then its burdens shall be light as shadows ; its pains shall bring with them their own healing, and sorrow shall become the beginning of joy. May we not be bowed down by the things which are less than we ourselves are. May we stand back from them at a right distance, and see them exactly as they are, in magnitude, in weight, in importance ; and, counting all things by the standard of the sanctuary, owning no other reference, trusting no other authority, we shall be able to keep at arm's length the things that do not befit our immortality, and the fascinations that would mock us with their empty spells. We are in Christ Jesus this day. We are upon his Cross ; we would be buried with him in the tomb that cannot be long sealed ; we would enter into the victory and joy of his resurrection. We would undergo such inspirations of feeling as shall lift us above all fear and doubt, and already carry us beyond the narrow stream of death. We would now enjoy all the blessedness of realized immortality. We would be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ; yea, through his grace we would enter into his glory, and in all spiritual realization we would even now walk with the saints in white, bearing palms in our hands, drinking at the upper fountains, and joining in the upper song. Surely that such delights might fill us hast thou given the days of the Son of man upon the earth. To-day we would forget the battle in the victory, the temptation in the sub-

lime reply, the difficulty in the assured rest. Our prayer is that Jesus Christ may, by the power of his priesthood, reign over us, subdue us wholly to his gracious will, sanctify all the events of Providence we cannot understand, prepare us for those higher fellowships which follow the discipline of earth. We would pray for one another. We would find words for the dumb; we would put into the lips of the silent fitting speech before God, to express pain for sin, contrition for iniquity, broken-heartedness for aggravated guilt. May we all unite in the one poignant cry, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." And may personal prayer be answered by personal forgiveness, and personal enjoyment of the living grace of God, revealed in Christ Jesus, in the reconstructed and comforted heart. May our prayers reach those who are out of the way. May we include in our intercession this day those who have escaped every other prayer. May we now appeal on behalf of those who have resisted every entreaty—or, are they cut off for ever? May they never, nevermore return? Thou knowest. Thy mercy endureth for ever. May we not yet be surprised into unutterable joy by seeing the most stubborn lay down his weapons of rebellion, and the most distant turning round with tears in his longing eyes? We would that all men might move in one direction, and be found at the end clustering lovingly around the Cross of Christ. Build us up in our most holy faith. Give us strength in the sanctuary; give us to feel that we are building our life-house upon eternal rocks, and help us to build diligently, rightly, wisely, so that when the test of fire is applied to our edifice it may stand approved of God.

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ comfort us; the Holy Spirit be our light and peace and hope; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—Three in one, One in Three—abide with us. Amen.

Acts xx. 24-26.

24. But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself [G., omits "as"; lit., "I make no account of my life (*qua*) dear unto myself." This awkward sentence appears more so in the original text, and there are grounds for supposing words to have been omitted. The Evangelist probably wrote, "Neither make I account of anything, nor think my life dear unto myself"], so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more.

26. Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

PAUL'S ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE.

REFERRING to the 20th verse, we find the employment of a very significant illustration : " I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you." The illustration implied in these terms, " kept back," is a nautical one. Paul had been sailing ; he had watched the manner of the ship ; he had seen the uses to which the sails and the tackling had been put, and in this expression he said, in the language which he employed, " I have put on all sail ; I have given the ship the advantage of everything belonging to it ; I have spared nothing, night or day ; the sails have been spread, and the supreme endeavour of the captain has been to bring the ship to the desired haven." This was what Paul had done in his ministry. A little more sail, or all the sail together. Why put it out?—for display ? No : the sails were not made for display, but for the assistance of navigation. Therefore whatever Paul did he did with the view of bringing the ship to port ; he had no other object. He spared no strength ; he counted no time ill-spent that was devoted to the interests and the security of the passengers committed to his charge.

Now we come to the 22nd verse : " And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there : save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." He knew the greater, but did not know the less : he knew the solemn total ; he did not know the items which constituted its great sum. That is the method of God's providence. He often shows us the end without showing the process ; He is accustomed to speak to us in great words that need to be taken to pieces and searched into, and it will be found, in pursuing that quest devoutly, how wondrous much God can pile into one word. The word is only one, yet when it is taken to pieces, so to say, every letter becomes a revelation, and the whole word spread itself out into a great discipline. Paul knew that he was going in the Spirit, and by the Spirit, and through the Spirit. That was a greater knowledge than any detailed information as to the separate items and particulars. Is there anything greater than truth ? In a sense there is. It is more important that we should have the truthful *spirit* than

the truth-quantity. The *love* of truth is a greater force in life than the mere acquisition of truth. We only pray as we *love* prayer ; the prayerful spirit is larger than any prayer that is possible to the human tongue. So the knowledge of God's purpose, acquiescence in that purpose, docile, child-like, loving union with all the operations tending to the culmination of that purpose, is infinitely greater, better, than knowledge of each particular incident that is to befall us in the out-working and development of life. What I want to know, if my spirit is right with God, is the purpose of God concerning me. He tells me nothing, and yet he tells me everything. In other words, he tells me everything, and yet tells me nothing. How can that be ? With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. He sends me out upon his battles and errands with this one assurance : " All things will work together for thy good, O sound heart." That is all we want to know. We do not want to forecast the " all things" in detail, and to enumerate them as if parts of a catalogue ; it is enough for the devoted and loving heart to know that all things work together for good to them that love God. You do not know what to-morrow will bring forth, but you know it cannot surprise God, it cannot outwit omniscience, it cannot overlap the resources of almightiness. We stand in the sanctuary of assured conviction that, not being our own, we are being watched and secured by the One Proprietor. How happy should we be if, in the spirit of that apostolic consecration, we could not vex and worry ourselves about daily details, but simply fall on the almighty arms, completely trust the Eternal Oath, and lovingly expect the fulfilment of the exceeding great and precious promises ! That is the end of faith. Paul knew that the result of the whole would be God's approval, heaven's rest, and therefore he took what he calls the " things" just as they came. He executed them ; he set his table that he might play the host to sorrow and loss and pain ; and if other guests came to eat the humble feast, the greater would be his surprise and joy.

What was the Apostle's ground of triumph ? It was that the Holy Spirit had undertaken the whole scheme and plan of his life. The " bonds and afflictions" that were foretold were foretold by Divine lips. The message is often made the better or the worse by the messenger who delivers it. There is a tone in which

you can tell a man that sorrow is coming upon him which will multiply that sorrow sevenfold. There is also a tone in which you can announce the certainty of physical decay and social degradation that shall have in it the very music of the heart of God. We should take our life charge from the lips of the Holy Spirit ; we should look upward for the map or chart by which we are to journey or to voyage. When the sketch of the road, or the sea, is handed us from above, the hand that drew the plan will secure the obedient out-working of it in completeness and joy. How could the Apostle Paul be apparently so reckless concerning the things that would befall him ? This is not understood by those who do not grasp the greater prudence ; it is a mystery to minds that only see the little prudence of self-security, self-care, or self-protection. What had the Apostle done that made him so callous to all human seeming, about " bonds and afflictions " ? This he had done : he had first consecrated his whole life to Christ. If we give to Christ small portions of our life only, then the gift appears to be tedious, and is of necessity painful. We must begin by giving all. Then the gifts in detail are only the out-carrying of a solemn step that involved the entire life. Have we yet entered into that mystery of self-immolation ? Until we learn that lesson our Christianity will be a frequent vexation and a very infrequent enjoyment or peace. To cut off the right hand is much to him who has done nothing more, but to the man who has first cut down himself, root and branch, the whole man, it is very little, it is a detail concerning the painfulness of which he speaks with gracious contempt. It is just here that we have to make the beginning of progress, and it is just here so many of us may possibly have made no beginning at all. You cannot give Christ any mere portions of yourself. You cannot say, " I will give him one day in seven, one hour in the day, one portion of my income, one tribute of my talent or influence." That, apparently so easy, is a moral impossibility. Could that lesson be got well into the thought and heart of all students of Christianity and all professors of the Gospel, we should have a vital and most beneficial revolution. We must begin by giving *ourselves* to Christ—not the right hand, not the single day in the week, not an assigned part or parcel of this or that property or resource, but the sum total, every whit of it ; nothing kept back in the left hand by some subtle

plan or skill of palming ; but the whole man, the whole ten strings of the heart ; then away you go, praising God upon an instrument complete—the whole instrument of tuneful life. The result will be utter impossibility on the part of any detail to give you one moment's concern. We live in totals ; we are vexed by details. Hear the Apostle's great, triumphant speech : “ But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself.” That is the explanation. Where the *life* is not dear the single *finger* cannot be much. Where the life is on the altar the suffering of a night's sleeplessness cannot be a martyrdom. Where the whole man is pledged, as with sevenfold oath, to serve the Cross, then any detail, coming under that great category of self-transfer to the Cross of Christ, may be spoken of with the contempt of spiritual triumph. This is the Christian victory. Another consideration under this, yet entering into it and vitally belonging to it, is that Paul had a definite purpose in life. What was that purpose ? His own words shall tell : “ That I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.” There is no mistake about the directness of that speech. You do not wonder whether the man was an academician, a philosopher, a lecturer, an inventor of magic ; you know what he was : a man with a cross, a man with a ministry, a man with a ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus, a man whose ministry was limited to testimony. You cannot burn him ; you cannot slay him ; you cannot imprison him ; he is beyond your power. It is in these spiritual realizations, rising into holy ecstasies, that the Christian soul realizes at once its sonship and its freedom. Paul wished “ to testify.” If the ministry were more than that, who could stand its continual strain ? If ministers were sent out to convert the people, who could take upon him the yoke and burden of the ministry ? The ministry of the kingdom of heaven is a ministry of testimony. The minister must give the warning, speak the truth, offer the welcome, point to the Cross, show the way, and then await the issue of events. He must work as if everything depended upon him, and then rest as if he could do nothing ; he must entreat men, persuade them, wrestle with them, more in sympathy than in argument ; he must soften his reasoning with his tears ; he must ennoble his eloquence by his pathos ; he must

cause his eloquence to be forgotten in his intercessions ; and then, when this ministry is fulfilled, he must stand back and see the salvation of God.

“ And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.” That is the spirit in which every sermon is to be preached ; and that is the spirit in which every sermon is to be heard. This is the last time you and I will ever meet in this house exactly as the assembly is constituted at this moment. There can be no repetition of this event. It may be largely reproduced—possibly for years it may be reproduced in its largest and broadest features ; we ourselves do not doubt or fear respecting that ; yet here is the thing that gives accent to the immediate occasion—we shall never meet again just as we are meeting at this solemn moment. When we meet again the old man will not be just where he is now. We will look round and say, “ Children sat in that pew ; are they there now ?” No. “ An earnest, sympathetic listener sat quite close to me on that occasion ; he will be here presently ” ? No ; he is dead. This opportunity returns no more. Richard Baxter was wont to say that he preached as a dying man to dying men. That is the spirit that gives solemnity to every appeal, pathos to every entreaty, urgency to every welcome.

Now the noble challenge : “ Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” Is it a question of blood ? Is it a matter of blood ? Then how far wrong have we been who thought it was a matter of amusement, enjoyment, excitement, social delight, and comfort ! “ Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.” Might there have been spots of blood upon the preacher ? Might he have been arraigned as a murderer of men ? Might it have been that the angels could have pointed to the blood spots upon his skin and upon his robe, and said, “ These are the witnesses against thee, thou faithless watchman ” ? Is it a question of blood ? If, on the one hand, the ministerial, a question of blood, then just as surely, on the other hand, the congregational and the individual, a question of blood. This is no occasion for simple intellectual enjoyment, or theological gratification ; this is a question of who is guilty—the preacher or the hearer ? the watchman or the man warned of coming danger ?

The Apostle was not pure from the blood of "one" man, or "many" men, but of "all" men. He had no fear of man; he spoke to the rich as well as to the poor, to the poor as well as to the rich. How stands the case between you and me to-day, seeing that we will never meet on earth exactly as we are meeting at this moment? We are keeping strictly within the lines of the text in putting this burning question to ourselves. Is there blood on me? Have I spared some men? Have I not given the Gospel welcome broadly enough, luminously enough? Have I delivered it with my lips only, or with my heart? Is there any one here under the impression that he is excluded from Christ's Cross, from God's forgiveness? This possible charge of blood makes me afraid. I am not speaking with the inimitable emphasis of the text, yet I cannot withhold the utterance of the yearning purpose of my heart, which has been that all men might be saved. I have not shut the door in the face of any man. To no applicant have I said, "You are too poor, too mean, too guilty, too low-born, too deeply sunk in sin." To contrition of heart no harsh word has been spoken; but, if in the unhappy and imperfect past I have not declared this Gospel of Christ with sufficient fulness and emphasis, may I endeavour to repair the omission in any individual case now before me, and say,

" While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return " ?

May I say, respecting the atonement of God the Son,

" His blood can make the foulest clean :
His blood availed for me " ?

I do not want merely to escape the charge of blood—that would be a mean ambition on the part of any Gospel watchman—I want you, my hearers, to escape it as well, and I want to be found at the last, if God be so pleased, at the head of an innumerable congregation, saying to the great Shepherd and Redeemer of all, " Behold me, and the children thou hast given me." O happy day, day of heaven !

LXXIX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the living God and Saviour of all men, we come to thee with psalm and prayer, with adoration and intercession, and pour out of our hearts all our desire and all our purpose. We will keep back nothing. We will tell thee the tale of our life, and will utter it only within the circle of the Cross, that, there uttering it, grace may abound over sin, and light may drive darkness away, and peace make quiet in eternal restfulness the tumult of our memory and conscience. We will speak of thy lovingkindness, and call it great ; of thy tender mercies, and regard them as without number. We will make our hearts familiar with thy love, as shown in the gift of thy Son, and in all the wonders of his life and death and resurrection, before speaking of our sin, for then our hearts will utter themselves in hope, and our spirits shall be saved from the darkness of despair. We will think of the mountain clothed with light, of the throne of the heavenly grace, radiant with welcomes to sinful penitents ; we will think of the cross, the light, the blood, the triumph ; we will remember that there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. Then, when we come to tell thee of our guilt, we shall feel inspired and quieted by all the reality of thy grace. Thou hast loved us with an eternal love. Before the foundation of the world was the Lamb slain for the sins of men. Thou dost take no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; thou dost take pleasure in life, in immortality, in the happiness of every creature of thy hand ; thou wouldst that we might turn and live. We remember these gracious words and all the tender promises which accompany them ; and so calling before our mind all the wonders of thy being, and all the tenderness of thy grace, and all thy readiness to pardon, we come, each crying in his own name and out of his own heart, " God be merciful to me a sinner." Thou dost stop the prayer in its utterance with a great answer ; we may not pray out in words our broken-heartedness, for whilst we are yet praying thou dost send answers by the angels, and we who began to pray are constrained to conclude with praise. What joy have they to whose hearts thou dost immediately speak ! The chains fall from off their hands ; the darkness is no longer a weight upon their eyes ; thou dost lead them forth to liberty, and establish their feet in secure places. May we enter into the mystery of this joy. May every one acknowledge that the house of God is the gate of heaven. Thou art drawing us nearer to the end without giving us to feel the violence of the motion. Day by day we ap-

proach the brink ; night by night our pulses lessen their decreed beatings. We see the place of our final lying down ; we feel gathering upon us the first shades of the great night. Yet dost thou lift us above all fear of the end, by Christ Jesus, thy Son, our Saviour. Thou dost show us that the end is the beginning, that the night is the morning, and that whilst we pass from earth, clinging to him who is the resurrection and the life, we are already amongst the number of those upon whom death has no more power. Whilst we live may we live well ; by our industry, may we double the hours of the day ; by our passionate yearning for all the highest fellowship of souls, may we already enter into heavenly society. For all that comforts we bless thee ; for the growing brightness of thy truth, shining upon our souls with added lustre every day, we thank thee. Continue thy wondrous grace and light and peace unto the end, and at the last may we say, though with failing breath, concerning all thy truth and light and comfort, "The half had not been told us." So whilst we grow in grace we shall grow in glory. Amen.

Acts xx. 27-29.

27. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.

28. Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops [denotes the *official* function of these elders. Had the word been translated shepherds, the sequence of thought with the following verb, etc., would have been obvious to the English reader], to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood [Paul's previous thought of his own death in connection with the ministry explains the unparalleled intensity of his language].

29. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

WHAT PAUL LEAVES BEHIND.

WE have just been moved with deepest emotion on hearing Paul say that we shall see his face no more. The question then arises, Since Paul is going, what will be left? When the Apostle goes, will not the whole fabric which he seemed to represent and sustain go along with him? Is Christianity the heroism of one personality? Is it a thing which belongs to the individual, like his incommunicable genius of mind, so that when he dies it will die with him? If Paul's estimation of himself had been that of an idolater or of a superstitious person, he would have reminded the Ephesian elders that in the removal of his personality they had themselves no longer any official standing, or any

claim upon public attention. We may learn something about the man's faith—that is to say, about his doctrine, his theology, his outward and heavenward look—by studying his spirit in relation to the things that were round about him. By an almost infinite subtlety of thought he indicates his apostolic primacy amongst men. He could be lowly-minded, and he could put on his crown and show that no diadem was so radiant as the one which sparkled on his head. He could say that he was not meet to be called an apostle ; he could also say that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles. On this occasion he shows his greatness, yet his modesty ; the almost supreme importance of his personal ministry, and yet the absolute independence of God of any man's service. He does not talk of himself as of a little man, a small factor in a great operation ; he speaks of himself as of the highest social and religious consequence in the matter of advocacy and the protection and guidance of Christ's Church. He seems to multiply himself into many when he gives the elders of the Church of Ephesus this charge, as if each of them were to be in his degree an Apostle Paul, and the whole were to constitute in their consolidation the influence and the energy which he embodied in himself. He does not say this in words, for then he would not truly and deeply say it ; he subtly and spiritually suggests the idea, and thus throws over the whole occasion the mystery of spiritual colour, and leaves us to feel rather than to see how vast was the place he occupied. When Paul goes what will be left ? The Church ! and the Church is greater than any member of it ; the Word ! and the Word is infinitely greater than all the ministers that preach it. The blood that bought the Church ! and that blood is beyond all rivalry and co-partnership of influence ; it is alone in its meaning, its energy, and its grace. Then *everything* will be left when Paul goes ? Yes, verily so. That is the mystery of Providence, the miracle of Divine and redeeming love. We can take nothing away from Christ's Church. The first-born dies, but the Church is as strong as ever ; the most eloquent tongue ceases its gracious utterance, but the music of the Cross loses no tone or note of its subtle mysterious enchantment. It is even good for us that the Apostle should be taken away ; it was expedient for us that Christ himself did not remain upon the earth in visible presence. Christianity is not an idolatry of a preacher ; Christianity is not a cus-

tomary attendance upon a particular place of worship ; Christianity does not depend upon its great men or its little men ; it is a spirit, a truth, a redeeming force, sanctifying reality ; it abideth for ever ; no part of it is laid in the tomb which holds the head of its noblest apologist ; the Church, like its Lord, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Paul's charge is Paul himself : " Take heed therefore unto yourselves." That was what Paul himself was always doing. He was a severe disciplinarian. He could not have spoken those words to other men if he had not himself first proved them. He was always undergoing the discipline of an athlete ; Paul was every day under training for a great prize fight and prize race. He had no periods of intermission ; he was always on the strain ; he kept his body under, he struck himself in the eyes lest, having preached to others, he himself should become " a castaway." Self-heed is the secret of public power. Preparation of yourselves is the preparation of your sermon. Take heed unto yourselves, be severe upon yourselves, and you will be gentle to other people. Regard yourself as a sinner greater than any man that lives, and then you will preach with growing eloquence, because growing in human knowledge and human sympathy. Do not spare yourselves ; do not live under your official clothing as if that made you better ; if it has any influence upon you at all, it makes you worse. Watch your soul ; watch the heart-gate ; watch it as much at midnight as at midday. Give yourself no liberty, license, holiday, or periods of rioting, but lay grappling-irons upon your life, hooks of steel upon passion, desire, and every impulse within you. You must have no liberty but the law of Christ. How could a man talk so if he did not know the mystery of self-discipline ? He did know it, and, therefore, we venture to repeat the assertion that Paul's charge is Paul himself.

And " take heed " also " to all the flock." That is the balancing consideration. The minister is not a monk shut up in his far-away and all but inaccessible cell ; he is a public man, a social man, a man with a great shepherdly heart, that can understand and love a thousand varieties of men. The true minister is the miracle of men. He has not the contemptible gift of loving only one kind or sort of men—the man who thinks as he does, who occupies his standpoint and calls it heaven. He loves all burning

souls, all ardent, consecrated minds ; erratic, heretic, eccentric, ordinary, conventional, stupid—intellectually, but morally consecrated, he takes them all within his shepherdly care, and is most a shepherd when he tarries longest for the weakest of the flock ; not so much a shepherd when at the head of the flock he sings a ballad to himself, as when he waits to gather up the tired lamb and to give it a lift up the steep place, mayhap lay his great soft hand upon it in tender caress and benediction. We should be greater if we were less, mightier if we were tenderer, wiser if more “ foolish ” according to worldly and carnal definitions of wisdom. Paul’s conception of the ministry was regulated and inspired by Paul’s conception of the Church. What was that conception ? Was the Church a club, a little gathering of men called together for superficial purposes, or for transient enjoyment ? It was a flock ; it was purchased ; it was purchased with the blood of God. Why, then the Church makes the ministry ; it is because the Church is so great that the ministry, properly understood, is so great. The ministry has no existence apart from the Church. The minister—be he Paul or Apollos or Cephas—is but an upper seat-holder. There is no ministry if there is no Church. We are members one of another ; we must have no merely official discrimination and recognition ; but One is our Master, and all the saints are the clergy of God.

Paul uses language full of intellectual suggestion and full of spiritual pathos. “ The Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” We have often had occasion to say that the word “ blood,” in its highest spiritual connections, has been wofully misunderstood. It is the custom of men first to debase a word by vulgar usage, and then to deprecate its truest and highest references. What grander word is there than “ blood ” ? Until we touched it, contaminated it, it stood next to “ love.” There are those who want to get rid of the word now, because of what they are pleased to consider its ignoble meanings and references. I charge them with first giving the term such references, and I would rescue the sacred word and apply it to its original uses. “ The blood is the life ” ; the life is the blood. God purchased the Church with his own life. It is life for life. Take that view of the Church, and you instantly enter into the sanctuary of a great mystery ; yet whilst you are wondering as those wonder who

stand under a lofty roof, and in the midst of marvellous poetic pillars, tender suggestions insinuate themselves into the heart, surprising lights break upon the eyes, and the whole house becomes sacred with presences felt though unseen. "We are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Unto him that loved us and hath washed us in his own blood, unto him be all the heavens of light." This attempt to reduce the value of the word "blood," and all that belongs to it, is part of a wicked purpose to lessen the sinfulness of sin, the abominableness of iniquity. It is the trick of the devil; but "surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." When you understand *sin* you will understand *blood*. When you see the hell which sin deserves you will see the Cross which God built.

Why should a man care anything about the world he is going to leave? That depends upon the quality of the man. There are those who want peace in their time, who want to leave all unsettled and thorny questions to be determined by those who come after them. The Apostle Paul was anxious for the fortunes of the Church at Ephesus, though he would himself see that Church no more. Christianity is not a new way of sneaking out of responsibility; Christianity is not a cunning method of leaving posterity to take care of itself. Christian love claims all time, all ages, all lands. It is the peculiar glory, because the characteristic tenderness, of Christianity, that it has no limits to its affection, no boundaries to the propositions of its holy philosophy. Even the Apostle Peter, ardent and, often mistakenly supposed, careless, said he would make such arrangements as would enable the Christians to whom he wrote to have holy things in their remembrance after his decease. The Apostle Paul—great economist, great statesman, supreme prince of the legions of Christ—could not leave Ephesus saying, "I am glad I shall suffer no more there"; but he cared for Ephesus as much as if he were going to spend the remainder of his days in the endeavour to convert its citizens. Paul knew that after his departing "grievous wolves" should enter into the Church, "not sparing the flock." There he gives you the subtle indication we spoke of concerning his own place in the Church, and his own protective power. The "wolves" could not come

in so long as Paul was there. Our great souls do something for us ; we must not reduce them to the humiliation of nonentity. They have their value ; we ourselves feel the stronger because of their presence. We do not cultivate faith by proxy, or live in other men's religion, yet we all feel the stronger when the strong man is there. Persons who are timid in a house by themselves are quite courageous when joined by others, and when the appointments are complete you would suppose that they had never felt a moment's fear of any possible assault. They are then at their best ; they have full control of themselves, and the full use of all their powers ; the nervous strain is taken away, and in a state of equanimity they can go about their duties with satisfaction and success. It is so in the Church ; yet God takes away from us our mighty men that he may train us as much by their absence as he did by their presence. Who would not long and desire, almost to the urgency of prayer, to have a whole year with John Bunyan, to know him, to have him in the house, to hear his very voice, to " pluck the good man's gown and share his smile" ? or the greater Milton, or the fiery Baxter, or the profound Howe and Owen ? Yet God is training us by their withdrawal, and God's greatest men are always the men who are still to come. The ages do not live backward ; God did not show the fulness of his power, and then call the ages to behold its contraction. The way of God is " first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," the whitening east, the purpling dawn, the growing day, the noontide splendour. We must look for greater things, thankfully and graciously recognize them when they come, and who knows but that to-day we may see sights which kings and prophets desired long, but died and never saw ? If our prayer be great, God's reply will be greater still.

LXXX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou takest away the sin of the world by Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour. We cannot tell where thou dost take it. Thou dost for ever bury it ; thou dost plunge it into eternal forgetfulness ; thou dost cast it behind thee, and no man evermore can find it. This is the miracle of the Cross ; this is the very mystery, and the very glory of grace Divine. Thou dost magnify thy grace against our sin ; the light of the one drives away the darkness of the other, so that it cannot be called back again. Thus are we called every day to rejoice in mercy—yea, to find in ourselves daily witness to the saving grace of God. We ourselves are heaven's epistles. Our life is not written with pen and ink of man's devising ; our life is traced by the Divine finger, shaped by the Divine hands, and inspired by the Divine eternity. We are God's workmanship ; we are God's husbandry. We are not the accidents of the time or the occasion ; we express the fore-ordination and infinite sovereignty of God. We will look upon ourselves highly ; we will rejoice in our principedom. We are not of the earth, earthy, when we are accepted in the Beloved ; we are then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, as having equal share in the infinite light and peace of heaven. So we will not look downward and see the grave ; we will look upward and see the immortality. We will think of the radiant heaven, pure angels, sanctified spirits, the one throne, the infinite light, the ineffable purity ; and so filling our minds with things Divine, we shall triumph over present pain and aching necessity, and tumultuous trouble, and grim death itself. We are rich in Christ ; we have all things and abound—yea, all truth, and light, and grace, and comfort, and peace—unsearchable riches, growing the more we use them, multiplying in our very hands—wondrous riches ; riches of God ; wealth of Christ. This is our possession through him who loved us and gave himself for us. We bless thee for these upliftings of soul, if even for but one day in the week. Surely we cannot fall back to the old level after such inspiration and benediction. Fall we shall, but not so far down as yesterday ; even in the fall we rise ; in returning from heaven to earth we find ourselves nearer heaven than before. Thus little by little, a step at a time, we rise toward purity, completeness, and consequent repose. We need the bread of life every day ; Lord, evermore give us this bread. This is the true bread which cometh down from heaven. We know its taste ; we are refreshed by its nutrition ; we grow stronger by eating such heavenly food. Take us more entirely under thy care

every day ; obliterate our selfishness ; give us to feel that though the smith may work hard and make long sharp weapons, they shall all rust in the very place where they were made if they were intended to hurt any child of thine. Save us from making weapons in our own defence ; save us from the insanity of taking care of ourselves. Put thine arms around us. Let thy smile be our light and our cheer, and let some word of thine sound the heavenly music in our heart's hearing, and then the angels will be nearer than the enemies, and our life shall have no sign of injury upon it, because of the infinite defence of God's almightiness. Amen.

Acts xx. 30-38.

30. And from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

31. Wherefore watch ye [another *pastoral* term], remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night [v. 9, ¶ ; the figure of the wakeful shepherd still maintained] and day with tears [2 Cor. ii. 4 ; xi. 29. Note the *special* pastoral care of "each one"].

32. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build *you* up, and to give *you* the inheritance among all them that are sanctified [G. "give *you* an allotment amid all the sanctified"].

33. I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel [for reason see v. 35].

34. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35. In all things I gave you an example, how that so labouring ye ought to help the weak [in faith], and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

36. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all.

37. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,

38. Sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more. And they brought him on his way unto the ship.

THE CHARACTER IN THE CHARGE.

HAVING this charge put into our hands to form a judgment of the speaker, what inferences regarding him and his work would be drawn? Do not let the mind travel beyond the four corners of this one particular charge. The evidence is before you ; looking carefully at it, in all its aspects and relations, what opinion would you form respecting the man who delivered this particular speech to the elders of the Church at Ephesus? Evi-

dently, in the first instance, here is a man over whom the spiritual has infinitely greater influence than the material. This man concerns himself burningly, and with passionateness and fanaticism, respecting things that are not of the earth and of time. He seems to see presences which are not patent to the eyes of the body. He is evidently ruled by considerations which are not limited by time and space. He speaks a strange language ; he is more a ghost than a man. What is his meaning ? Right or wrong, his meaning is intense ; right or wrong, the subject which engages him burns in him like an inextinguishable fire. He is a fanatic, or an enthusiast ; he is carried away by some spiritual extravagance. He speaks as a man might speak who is bound to an altar, and to whom the sacrificial fire was about to be applied. Surely he is operating under the influence of the wildest hallucination. But it is no hallucination to his mind ; it has shape, features, expression, tone, colour, life ; it is a Figure that puts out a more than human hand, and takes his hand lovingly in its almighty grasp. The speaker of this charge—be he whom he may—is full of it. He evidently believes that instincts are more divine than formal logic. He clearly believes that there is something in man that cannot be covered, fed, satisfied by anything that grows on earth or shines in the sky ; call it feeling, imagination, passion, spirituality, divinity, it is something with an aching necessity that scorns the proffered aliment of time, and asks if there be no better food in all the spaces of the universe. The man is clearly superstitious, of a highly excitable temperament, quite a fanatic, wholly beside himself, not at all practical ; a man—if we may so figure him—rather with great strong pinions with which to fly, than with strong and sturdy feet with which to walk the solid earth. Still he means it all. These are not artificial tones ; there is what we know by the name of *soul* in them. We may pity the hallucination, but we must admire the earnestness. We may look on bewildered even to stupefaction as we gaze upon a noble soul following shadows, and chasing bubbles, and crying to eery ghosts to help him in life's long travail. Still he is a noble soul. If he were less intense, we should despise him, or at least distrust him ; but he is so whole-hearted that our pity is elevated by our admiration. Be he whom he may, and what in other respects he may, he is, on the face of this speech, an honest man.

Looking further into his unique and energetic eloquence, it is evident that this man counts his life as of less value than his work. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." That is a new standard of valuation; that is a new mint and stamping of old words and venerable tradition. This man has so worked that his "course"—his "ministry"—has become to him a greater quantity than his very life. We may outlive ourselves; our work is our greater self; our ministry is our immortality. If the Church could learn this lesson, the Church would know the mystery of crucifixion with Christ. The Church would get rid of the idea that godliness is bound up with opinion and dogma only, and would pass into the glorious ecstasy which counts all things loss that Christ may be won. We speak of our lives being dearer than anything our lives can contain. We reason superficially and sophistically; when we come to a right view of things we shall see that to do our duty bravely is a greater thing than to live many days upon the earth; to suffer heroically is the true solution of life's holy mystery. This man will turn failure into success. When he has given up his life, all other gifts become easy; when he has given himself, all he has is contained in the complete and sacrificial donation. Christ gave himself, and we must present ourselves "living sacrifices." This man grows more fanatical. He has risen to the point at which life itself is despised as compared with what he superstitiously calls his "ministry," or fatalistically calls his "course." A ghostly power called destiny has got hold of him, and wrought in him a sublime contempt for all bribes, flatteries, and earthward allurements. He has gone from the tribe of practical men; he is the victim of a spiritual extravaganza. Poor soul! We would have detained him in our company if we could, but such passion would have burned down the walls of our prison; such sacrifice would have turned our cold prayers into blasphemies; such heroism would have made our little efforts contemptible in our own eyes. So he has gone to live an ideal life in ideal spaces. Peace be with his soul!

But a third view of the speech leads us to inquire whether, in thus regarding Paul as a superstitious and fanatical man, we are not in error. Reading single lines of the speech, we feel that

Paul is insane, in the sense of being unduly transported with what he believes to be spiritual realities ; but reading the speech from end to end, he is really a man of wondrous mental grasp. It is a noble speech ; it is a statesman's eloquence. This man is no fanatic ; he has power to walk upon the solid earth, and he looks well as he does so ; there is no crouch in his royal gait. He is most tender, shepherdly, careful, practical. He does not want to have his work frayed away or overturned by the cruel strength of the enemy ; he would have his work stand for ages ; he speaks like a man who has been building from eternity. No honest reader can despise the intellectual force of the man who made the speech which is now our text. Read it through from the beginning to the end, and hear its solemn music ; mark its massive strength ; note its comprehensive grasp, and be quieted by its sublime repose. When we hear some men speak, we feel how rash a thing it would be to contradict them. They are not men likely to be misled by sophisms ; they are not made of the material which easily yields to new experiments ; they have a solid look ; they are men one would like to consult upon practical questions ; their very presence and manner of dealing with things would lead one to wish that in all the crises of life we could have them near to suggest, inspire, and strengthen. Reading this speech of Paul, such are my personal feelings regarding him. He is not a little man ; he is no trifler. You may differ with him, but the very necessity of differing with him will involve you in a tremendous controversy. It is not a mere difference, a verbal diversity of judgment ; it is root-and-branch work ; you are either with him wholly or away from him entirely, and that very fact establishes by collateral and incidental evidence the greatness of the man, the multitudinousness of the elements which make up his great personality.

So we begin to modify the first judgment we formed as to Paul's fanaticism. He gradually comes nearer to us, and we feel that if we have mistaken his stature, our mistake was due to the distance which separated us from him. What appears to be a little speck in the far-away cloud may prove in reality to be a royal eagle, when the flight is over and the noble adventurer has returned from the gates of the sun.

Looking again at the charge, we cannot but see that what began in the sublimest theology concludes in the noblest beneficence. "So labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." We thought he was a fanatic; he now stands before us as the advocate of the poor, and the defender of those who have no helper. This is the complete orb of religious character: theology mounting to the very throne of God, beneficence stooping to the very lowest of the needy creatures amongst whom we live. The theology that is not sphered off by morality, beneficence, sacrifice, is a sublime lie. Now, our first impression about the man's passionate fanaticism is wholly corrected, and we apologize to him for having for one moment thought that he was lost in spiritual ecstasies. Only men who are capable of such theological excitement are capable of life-long and life-sacrificing beneficence. The charity that is not lighted at the fires of heaven will be blown out by the winds of earth. For a time it may seem to be beautiful, but, being without root, in the necessity and divinity of things it cannot live. Characterize it by what figure you may, whatever is not fixed in God cannot live as long as God.

So perusing the charge in its wholeness and unity, I bow before the great Apostle as before the noblest of his kind—the very prince of the Church; the supreme man amongst mortals; the favoured one who saw more of heaven's light and more of heaven's magnitude than any other man. We may well weep with the elders of the Church; we may well kiss our great teacher with our heart's lips, for there are no farewells so tearing, so destructive, as the farewells of the soul. Other farewells may be made up, other vacancies can be supplied; but who can represent the man who has loved our souls, held fellowship with our spirits, spoken more tenderly than he supposes himself to our very inmost life, and who has stood for us when we ourselves were dumb, as advocate and intercessor before God, in the name of the Saviour of the world? There are no endearments so tender as the endearment created by religious understanding and sympathy. All other unions perish, all other associations are but for the passing moment; immortality, true kindred, absolute identity of spirit, thought, purpose, can be found in Christ alone.

We do not know our apostles until they tell us we shall see their faces no more. How kind of them to give us work to do which lies nearest to our hands! Paul did not conclude with some thunder-burst of theological eloquence which might have been variously interpreted, but he concluded with these words which a child can understand—which only God himself can fully illustrate—which the Cross alone entirely exemplifies—“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

LXXXI.

P R A Y E R .

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou show light unto them that are groping in darkness. If any know not which way to turn, send thou the beam of light which will show the way thou thyself hast worked out. If any are cold of heart, and are filled only with the wonder of ignorance, do thou send the ardent heat from on high that shall warm the cold life and fill it with the surprise of new revelations. Thou art a continual surprise ; we cannot find thee out unto perfection, saying, This is the beginning and this is the end. God is great, and we know him not. No man can see God and live. There is no searching of thine understanding. Thy way is infinite, and the clouds are the dust of thy feet. The light is thy robe, and thou dost leave our imagination behind thee, unable to follow in the wondrous pursuit. Yet dost thou tarry for us ; thou dost wait until our weakness can overtake thee, and then in long speech of love thou dost reveal thy purpose to us, and show that the darkness is thine as well as the light, that thou didst make the rough hills as well as the smooth plains. Then thou dost pass on, and we lose thee, and again dost thou return and wait for us. Thus are we brought on our way—stopping, wondering, praying with great agony and heart-fear, and then praising thee with loud rapture and cloudless hope. This is thy way with us ; the meaning is love. We would see thee more clearly ; but this is our impatience, not our wisdom, that thus speaks. So we will have no way of our own ; we will not venture to take counsel as upon equal terms with God ; we will say alway, “The will of the Lord be done.” This we have learned of Jesus Christ, thy Son ; out of him we cannot learn this greatest lesson ; it is the meaning of his Cross ; it is the expression of his priesthood ; it is the mystery of his sacrifice. At the Cross we learn this lesson ; whilst the Victim dies we hear its music and we learn its meaning. Lord, evermore teach us to speak those words with our hearts. Then we shall have no pain, no loss, no fear ; we shall be lifted above the clouds, and stand in the eternal brightness. We would be hidden in the sanctuary of thy Son ; our Saviour ; Rock of Ages, cleft for men. We would stand in the cleft of that Rock until all danger be over-past, and whilst we are there we shall hear the still small voice, the subdued eternity, the condescending Infinite, the whisper of the thunder of God. Lord, show us how little we are, and how great ; how abject, how august. Teach us that in ourselves we have lost all things ; that in Christ we have found more than we have lost—yea, unsearchable riches, wealth upon wealth,

beyond all counting, treasures infinite. Wherein we have complained of thy way, take it as the ungrateful reproach of our ignorance. Thou knowest how shut in we are by yesterday and to-morrow—two high stone walls that make a prison for our little life. Thou knowest that we cannot tell the meaning of our own words; have pity upon us, and forgive the iniquity of our prayers. The Lord accept us in the Beloved; the Lord interpret us at the Cross; the Lord answer our necessity and not our language; the Lord read the pain of our heart and the cry of our inmost soul, and listen not to the words which cannot tell the tale they mean to relate. Thou knowest us altogether: our beginning; our course; our advantages and disadvantages; our physical peculiarities; our social surroundings; the circumstances over which we have no control; the battles fought in secret; the prayers we dare not speak. Blessed be thy name, thou wilt judge with righteous judgment; thou dost not take man's view of our life, but thine own. Thou knowest us altogether, in word and thought and innermost motive. Judge us of thy great mercy; pity us in the Cross of thy Son, Christ Jesus. Thou knowest what we most need just now: some are here in great fear, and others in great hope of joy; some are just returned from the open grave, and others are just returned from the wedding altar; some are in the midst of perilous journeys and adventures; others are in darkness and in doubt, whose life is groping for results, rather than moving straight towards them; some want to turn, and feel as if they could not; some would pray, but their lips cannot speak; some are purposing goodness, and some evil. But thou understandest every one of us; thou canst come to each as if an only child. So, in Christ Jesus, Son of God, Lamb of God, bleeding Sacrifice, we put ourselves into thy hands and say, "The will of the Lord be done." Amen.

Acts xxi. 1-14.

1. And when it came to pass that we were parted [same word in Luke xxii. 41] from them, and had set sail [better, "had put to sea again after having *torn* ourselves away from them"], we came with a straight course unto Cos, and the next day unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

2. And having found a ship crossing over unto Phœnicia, we went abroad, and set sail ["put to sea"].

3. And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left hand, we sailed unto Syria, and landed at Tyre [the whole district from Cilicia to Egypt was called Syria. On Tyre, cf. Josh. xix. 29; Ezek. xxvi. and xxvii.; Isa. xxiii. Hiram was Solomon's ally, and Ethbaal, father of Jezebel, is called by Josephus, king of Tyre. After its conquest by Alexander, Tyre was made a free city by the Romans, and was still a large commercial centre when visited by Paul, and perhaps also by Christ. Tyre is 30 miles N. W. from Nazareth]: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

4. And having found the disciples [xi. 19 ; xv. 3. Note that the little church in the great city had to be sought out], we tarried there seven days : and these said to Paul through the Spirit [xx. 22], that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.

5. And when it came to pass that we had accomplished the days, we departed and went on our journey ; and they all, with wives and children [this little fellowship of disciples expressly associated wives and even children with the men in church action], brought us on our way, till we were out of the city : and kneeling down on the beach, we prayed, and bade each other farewell [same word as "parted" in ver. 1] ;

6. And we went on board the ship, but they returned home again.

7. And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais [Accho of Judges i. 31 ; our Acre. An older city than Tyre and Cæsarea, it has outlived them both] ; and we saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

8. And on the morrow we departed, and came unto Cæsarea [see viii. 40] : and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven [Meyer, following Tisch. Born, puts the comma after "Philip," and takes the meaning to be that Paul's company entered into Philip's house, and even went to Cæsarea because "he (Philip) was the Evangelist of the seven," *i.e.*, "it was not his former position as overseer of the poor, but his present position as evangelist that made him so important to the travellers"], we abode with him.

9. Now this man had four daughters, virgins [G., "virgin (or, unmarried) daughters"], which did prophesy ["*preach*"] ; only since the seventeenth century has the English word "prophesy" been limited to the sense of prediction. R. V. ought not to have retained it in this, its obsolete, sense].

10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus [probably the same mentioned in xi. 28].

11. And coming to us, and taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own feet and hands [cf. Jer. xiii. 5, and John xxi. 18], and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle [the company may have laid aside their girdles, one of which Agabus "took"], and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

12. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13. Then Paul answered, What do ye, weeping and breaking [G., "What are you doing that you commence weeping and (so) are breaking the heart of me?" [my heart? for I am ["I" emphatic, *i.e.*, "my heart is"] ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. [The unselfish grief of his friends touched Paul after he had conquered his own natural feelings ; but loyalty to the Lord Jesus over-rules all.]

14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

THE QUIET INTERVAL.

THERE are some endings which seem to be final. Such an ending we found in the last words of the interview between the Apostle Paul and the elders of the Church of Ephesus. It seemed as if after that ending there could be no resumption. Anything that could be said after such a communion of heart with heart that was not bathed with tears would be of the nature of an anticlimax. After such agony there is only one natural and gracious possibility, and that is—silence. Silence is as eloquent as speech ; in its right place it is even more eloquent. But after the interview at Miletus with the elders of the Church of Ephesus nothing was possible but—silence. The night had come ; the agony could not be increased ; the senses reeled ; all life seemed to be a mocking dream ; whether things will ever come into natural course and shape again gracious time will reveal. Blessed silence ! blessed time ! We so often ignore those teachers, and go out in quest of noisy speakers. What can teach like time, or heal, or lift up again, or take away the very burden which at first it seems to impose ? If we grow towards old age, it is only that we may grow towards youthhood again : old age being the gate that opens upon Christian immortality. Have periods of silence in your life ; remit many of the controversies and difficulties to the adjustment and healing of silent, gracious, patient time. At the end of the days you will see the meaning of it all ; and you, who entered into the first gate wearily, saying you could carry no more burdens and speak no more words, will pass through the second gate strong to carry, eloquent to speak, heroic to dare. But let solid, even slow, impartial time have its own way. You will only spoil its purpose by your impatience. You cannot hasten the old charioteer ; he drives at a certain pace, and he will not be mocked or importuned into any increase of speed. Thank God for breaks that give us release from old cares and heavy burdens, and give us opportunity of gathering ourselves together again into still better condition and still augmented strength. Let Paul alone for a time ; let him have his sail out. Thank God he has gone upon the water, that will do him good. Bless God for the alternative of the water for the land, of the land for the water ; of

the day for the night, and the night for the day. By these alternatives we are rested and quieted and made young again. Let us be glad that he will spend all the day on the water, and all the night, and to the lullaby of its splash may yield himself to sleep. After such communion he needs sleep ; only such sleep as man can realise—not animal sleep only, but that deeper, more mysterious, and gracious sleep into which the Lord alone can throw man, and out of which he comes with poignant wishes, and new impulses and new relationships, which make him forget yesterday's burden and yesterday's travail. Let him alone ; he has passed through a hot fever ; give him time.

In the third verse we read : “ We landed at Tyre : for there the ship was to unlade her burden.” Poor ship ! she must have rest, too, in a way. We must have landing places, and unlading times, and standing-still periods in life. Whilst the ship stands still Paul is on the alert. Business arrangements are turned into spiritual opportunities. The moment the ship stopped Paul became his old apostolic self again. “ Whilst you stop,” said he, “ I must be up and doing. What is this place ? Who lives here ? What is the religious condition of the locality ? ” How the war-horse stirs in him ! Again and again we have thought, “ He is now done, and we shall hear no more of him,” when suddenly he sprang up again from the dust and was red with holy fire, palpitating with added life, quivering with holy excitement. The sail has done him good. He has opened his eyes and seen land, and now he turns a necessity of the ship into an opportunity for preaching the Gospel, or making Christian aggression. Is there not a lesson here for us—the sailors of to-day ? The place of business is closed—why not inquire for an opportunity of doing religious good ? Holiday to-morrow—why not have a feast for the poor, and the halt, and the blind ? A man has lost his train—why not try to save his soul ? A crisis has occurred in the business—why not make it an opportunity for enlarging prayer and bringing up intercession to its agonizing and prevailing tone ? The stop of one course should be the beginning of another. He never lacks opportunity who looks for it.

What was done at Tyre ? We read, “ And finding disciples.”

That is not right reading ; stumbling over those words ; we might imagine that the disciples were found haphazard, were come upon quite casually and unexpectedly. The real reading is, " And seeking out disciples." Why not seek out beautiful scenery ? Why not discover the features of the new geography ? Because Paul's promised and unchangeable purpose was to advance the kingdom of Christ. There was no scenery to Paul ; there was no geography ; there was nothing but lost humanity and the redeeming Cross of Christ. So may men be lifted above the very system of worlds in which they live, and count that system nothing except in its relation to the men who inhabit it, and to the opportunities it may afford for their spiritual redemption and education. Men who have not this Divine purpose in their hearts are overcome by their circumstances ; a fine mountainous country would detain them a week longer on the journey ; a new river would send them into ecstasies ; a new specimen in botany would fill them with rapture. To Paul there was nothing in the world but two things : lost man and redeeming Christ ; and he counted all things but loss that he might serve the Christ who had saved him. Paul and his company sought out the disciples—not an easy thing then and there ; not always an easy thing here and now. Some of you would blush if you had to ask if there were any Christians in your neighbourhood. You could not ask the question. You wait for them to turn up, but you do not give them any encouragement to disclose themselves. You, who could ask if there were artists in the neighbourhood—authors, poets, great men of business, dare not ask if there were any praying people in the locality ; dare not ask if any wooden shed has been put up by the hedge side, or at the street corner, or in the back places of the town in which you could meet others for prayer. Paul never asked any other questions ; what wonder that he found disciples when he sought for them ? " Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The man sitting next you at this moment would thank God if he could have an opportunity to speak concerning spiritual things. If Paul were here now, he would remain here all day ; having delivered his sermon, he would ask the people to speak to him. He would make a business of it ; nothing would turn him aside. Now and again he did disclose the one purpose of his life, and it was always in this tone :

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ.” He was never weary of his work, though often weary in it.

Leaving Tyre, they “came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.” Make the most of religious opportunities. A whole day together well spent may be more than a week together with neglected opportunities and uncultivated spaces. What a day it was! Only one; but so crowded, so many questions to ask. What eager listening! “The Apostle will be gone to-morrow; now is our opportunity; let him speak and pray and bless and comfort.” That is the case always; we have never more than one day together with any certainty; we should look upon every opportunity as the last: when the man who prays for us says “Amen,” we should feel as if the last knock had been delivered on heaven’s door by his trembling and pious hand; and thus we would give accent to every occasion, immediate and poignant meaning to things which might otherwise be regarded as amongst the etceteras of life, crowded into some indicative term, rather than made the special and penetrating emphasis of life. Could we have Paul with us one day! We would appoint the meeting to take place very early in the morning, and some of us, looking at the dial, would say, “There are still five minutes to run before the day is quite out;” some of us would, with a kind of pardonable stealthiness, almost wish as if we could put the finger back on the dial-plate. But we allow our opportunities to pass; when the man is gone, then we begin to whine about his greatness, and the opportunities we had of praying with him in his mighty intercession. So the hearts of men are broken every day. We cannot make up anything to the absent Apostle; he was in the town; he spent a year there, or two, or five; we never knew him till the closing weeks of his ministry; the man that *might have prayed to heaven’s shaking* was unknown until the week before he left the village. Then the blank-eyed villagers whined about him, and said what they would have done had they known who had been amongst them. It is a whining lie! One day with the Apostle Paul!—a man who never wasted a word; a man whose every look was a picture, every tone a revelation, every touch a benediction. He is still here; his great

epistles are with us ; his written soul lies in our houses neglected. Let us not add to our lies by whining over his personal absence !

“ And the next day—” Oh that there should be any next day to festivals of the soul ! Mocking word ! “ Next ” day—why, that day can have no “ next.” To speak of it as “ next ” day seems to drag it down to an equality with vulgar time ; speak of it as some other day, a million centuries off. Yet not so, because other people must have the festival as well as we. Paul is advancing in his course and scattering blessings as he goes. “ The next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Cæsarea : and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven ; and abode with him.” If we had our choice of any one day which we might spend with the Apostle Paul, I think some of us would choose this particular day. What a meeting that was ! We have to meet our old selves sometimes. Do not make any mystery of the bodily resurrection until you have settled the mystery of those personal social resurrections which are taking place every day in the week. “ One of the seven.” So was Stephen. Paul “ entered into the house of Philip.” Why, this is the young man whose name was Saul, at whose feet the men who stoned Stephen laid down their clothes ! What a meeting was that ; what silence ; what suppressed tears ; what crowded memories ; what self-lacerations ! Philip might not have been there at all but for the very man who was now visiting him ; it was owing to the persecution that Philip fled away. Day by day we have seen in our reading how Paul came upon the work of Philip, in this town and in that town, and now he is Philip’s guest. May our meetings with old enemies be as sweet and gracious ! You cannot escape from your old self. To-morrow you will meet a man upon whose face your whole life will be written, and you will read it in every line. The day after, as you are lifting the wine to your lips, you will see a man the sight of whom will make you set it down again, and wish that the earth would open and let you through into darkness. To-morrow you will see a signature every stroke of which will be like a sword-stroke on your heart. To-morrow you will see a crushed rose-leaf, a faded photograph, a sere and yellow book which will bring up all your life. Sometimes our reminiscences are of the most joyful kind, and we bury twenty years in one grip of the hand.

Sometimes those reminiscences are of the other sort, and a look doubles our age. The solemn fact to remember is that we *meet men again*. Life is not closed with to-day. Our words have gone out from us, rolling over the waves of the wind, but we shall hear them again. Let us take care how we live. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If you have lost money, depend upon it it belonged to some other man. If you have suffered pain, God has weighed the measure of it in his golden scales, and you have had not one pang too many. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is comfort in this as well as sadness. If men have spoken ill of me, depend upon it I have spoken ill of them first in some way, and in some mysterious economy God is visiting upon me my own iniquities. Do not let me stand up as the righteous and perfect man who never did anything, but who is suffering unjustly. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" in some way at some time. The sovereign you lost was not your own; you cannot trace its owner, you cannot tell why you, poor innocent creature, should suffer so. But it is quite right. As I have done unto others, so hath God requited me. The law is equally true on the other side. If you do things good, then things good you will reap. Make a feast for those who cannot make a feast for themselves, and you shall have bread at the last; make other lives glad, and you shall have light at eventide. It is a solemn economy under which we live. If we look at the special aspect only, we tremble and complain, but if we look at the other aspect as well, we are constrained to say, "The ways of the Lord are equal."

Now Paul will be besought not to go forward; his own company will say, "Perhaps you had better not." In this case Paul said nothing to the four daughters of Philip, nothing to the prophet Agabus. But in the 12th verse we read, "And when we heard these things, both we——" That was the sting. When a man's nearest comrades fail him, when the people he brought with him to cheer his way stand in front of him and say, "Turn back," then, poor soul, what can he do but break right down? So did Paul. When they that were of his company besought him not to go up to Jerusalem, Paul was forced into speech, and answering, said, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am

ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." There the Roman spoke ; there the Christian Roman spoke. We are told that for a Roman to fear danger was treason, but for a Lacedæmonian to hesitate was treason. Here is a man in whose tone you can find no hesitancy. Having consecrated the life first, all the details of suffering which led up to the last oblation were mere trifles. He himself—body, soul, spirit—was on the altar ; to dwell, therefore, upon the items of martyrdom was to trifle with the sublimity of the occasion. We have given nothing whilst anything has been withheld ; but having given ourselves, all other gifts are nothing.

Where is the Apostle Paul to-day ? Where the man that speaks thus, and so ? Could he live now ? Would he have any following now ? Would he not now be called fanatic, emotionalist, enthusiast ? Would common-sensed and real-hearted men respect him now ? Would not there be teachers of what is falsely called prudence who would ask him to stop and think and weigh well his course ? Again and again would I teach, as for these several years I have endeavoured to teach, that there are two prudences—the little prudence, that would gain its life and therefore loses it ; the great prudence, that loses its life and in the losing finds it. The little prudence is the more popular ; you can get at it more easily, may stroke its little sleek head more comfortably ; it lies quiet under your pat, and you can make something of it. The great prudence, the sublime dash, the sacred fury will not accept any patronage ; lives beyond the cloudy region of compliment and congratulation, and goes on to Golgotha, to Olivet, to heaven.

LXXXII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast called us to thyself in Christ Jesus thy Son. We belong to thee ; thou hast made us, and not we ourselves ; we are the work of thine hands ; we represent thine own wonderful thought. Thou didst make man in thine own image and likeness, and to that great image thou art drawing him every day by gracious providence, by manifold service, by heavenly inspiration. Thou hast charged us with a great responsibility ; thou hast made us stewards ; thou hast put us in trust of great things, and from us thou dost expect great replies. Thou dost search our hearts as with a lighted candle ; thou dost try our motives, and there is no escape from the burning of thy judgment. Help us to know where our resources are, and to avail ourselves of their plentifulness, so that we may never know the pain of poverty, but may always know the security of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Thou hast enabled us to say, under difficult circumstances, "The will of the Lord be done." This is thy miracle in our hearts. Thou hast broken down our will and put in its place thine own. It is well ; it is best ; it is right. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven ; not our will, but thine be done. Thy will is full of wisdom and goodness ; it is founded upon thy righteousness and charged with all the wisdom of omniscience. We are of yesterday, and know nothing, so how can we trust our own wisdom or will ? Look upon us as little children ; take hold of our hands ; lead us on every day, and comfort us with such whispered love and such surprises of grace as shall fit our necessity and be the healing of our agony. Oh the pain—the bliss of living ! Surely this is sweet torment ! Thou dost lift us up, and we cast ourselves down ; thou dost show us a great light, but we must climb up to it through thick clouds ; all thy way is a wonder ; thy purpose is a hidden love. We cannot walk round it, or lay a line upon it, or put it into words, and carry it like a discovery of our own. Thou dost forbid our words and accept only the worship of our silence in the higher moods and most marvellous display of power. Thou wilt not let us boast. Sometimes we would open our mouth in vanity, but then dost thou take our word away, and we are as dumb things before thee. This is the Lord's rebuke, often sore, always good. Thou dost call us to read more deeply the inner meanings of things. Thou dost show us the kingdom through the parable. Thou wilt not let us rest finally anywhere. Thou hast only stopping-places where we may sit down awhile, and then soon be up again to pursue life's unwinding and immeasurable road. Help us to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. May our heart have no

desire but his will. Then shall it be granted in many answers—yea, in redundancy of love, in miracles of grace. Thou art showing us the end upon the earth that we may know the beginning of better things in heaven. Thou dost dig the grave quite closely to our houses, lest we be fascinated by the garden and forget the tomb. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet ; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. We cannot tell how thou wilt finish our lesson here ; we cannot count the number of the pages and say “ This is the end.” Thou dost break off our speech in the middle of a sentence, and when we are about to speak the word that would reveal everything, thou dost fasten our lips as with a seal. This is thy way ; it is in the clouds ; it is on the deep waters ; it is in the wilderness ; we cannot follow it, and when mockers ask us to explain, we can but fall to pray. We put one another into thy kind hands, thou Disposer of the lot. Thou knowest what each most needs, what some dare not ask for, and what all require ; so what can we say to thee but “ The will of the Lord be done” ? We have prayers with which we could torment thee, desires we could urge upon thy throne, but we should be before thee like talking fools and men that know not the weight of their own words. So we will only pray to be taught to pray. We will not speak our own prayers, but the prayer of thy Son, our Priest. “ Not my will, but thine be done.” On another day, unclouded and infinite in light, thou wilt show the answer to the riddle ; thou wilt give the solution to the problem ; thou wilt explain the mystery. We want that day to be now, but thou wilt not allow our impatience to speak ; we will wait for it. This is the triumph of thine own faith wrought in our souls. Pity us as we pity blind men. Have compassion upon us as we have compassion upon dying children who cannot tell where the pain is. The Lord look upon us through his own tears, and see in us, not sinners, but his own image and likeness, spoiled by us, but redeemed and reclaimed by the mystery of the Cross. Comfort us day by day ; deliver us from the demon of despair ; give us hope again—sweet hope, singing hope, bright hope. May there come upon our way such cloudless light as shall make us dance before the Lord for very joy of heart. Make the house a home ; the home-a church ; the church the lower heaven. As for those who are not with us, we would they were ; and this will of ours was first thine. But Jesus failed ; when he would have gathered the cities as a hen gathereth a brood under her wings, they would not ; and he cried over them a great rain of tears. It is so with us. The prodigal will not come to the feast ; the far-away wanderer will wander farther ; we see the vacant place, and it makes havoc in our heart. As for those who are dying—going up like dew exhaling in the sun—the Lord bless us, for he has blessed them, and when we weep, may it be for ourselves. The Lord be our Father, Mother, Nurse ; the Lord wait upon us like a servant ; the Lord keep us as in a rock ; the Lord look upon us as a sun ; the Lord defend us like a shield. Amen. ◊

Acts **xxi.** 15-40.

15. And after these days we took up our baggage [G., "packed up." Got our things ready, or, equipped ourselves for the visit to Jerusalem at the feast. The marginal reading of the R. V. is the correct one], and went up to Jerusalem.

16. And there went with us also certain of the disciples from Cæsarea, bringing with them one Mnason [perhaps Greek form of *Manasseh*] of Cyprus, a Cypriote Jew or proselyte who had his home at Jerusalem, as had also Barnabas and his sister Mary, mother of John Mark, who were also Cypriotes, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge [arrangements for lodging were usually made beforehand on these visits to the feasts].

17. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

18. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

19. And when we had saluted them, he rehearsed one by one the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

20. And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands [G., "myriads," a word used indefinitely of large numbers] there are among the Jews of them which have believed; and [here we come again upon one of the greatest difficulties of early church life] they are all zealous for the law.

21. [Gal. i. 14]: and they have been informed ["instructed" as in Luke i. 4] concerning thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

22. What is it therefore [G., What then is there? *i.e.*, How lies the case]? they will certainly hear that thou art come.

23. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men with a vow on them [xviii. 18. This vow differed from that of Aquila, being the regular vow of a Nazarite of days, Num. vi. 1-21. The usual time was thirty days, at the end of which the Nazarite shaved off and turned the "hair of his separation," offering the prescribed sacrifices in the temple. Wealthy and pious friends often undertook this expense for poor Nazarites]; these take and purify [same word as in LXX. Num. vi. 3, 8; *not* therefore purify, but "become with them a Nazarite," or, be consecrated with them: share with them their vow] thyself with them, and be at charges for them,

24. That they may shave their heads: and all shall know that there is no truth in the things whereof they have been informed [instructed] concerning thee; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, keeping the law.

25. But as touching the Gentiles which have believed [xv. 5-31], we wrote [B, D, 40, and many vss. have "sent." which is preferable.

"Wrote" is supplied from xv. 20, and erroneously retained by R. V.] giving judgment [G., "sent after we had judged that." It is to be borne in mind that the "sent" refers to the Gentile brethren of Syria and Cilicia who had requested these elders of Jerusalem to resolve questions raised abroad by *unauthorised* critics *from* Jerusalem] that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication.

26. Then Paul took the men, and the next day ["and" should follow "them"] purifying himself with them [G., "having consecrated," *i.e.*, having entered into participation of their Nazarite state] went into the temple, declaring [lit. "giving common notice of"] the [prospective] fulfilment of the days of purification, until [duration of the notice] the offering was offered for every one of them.

27. And when the seven days [the usual notice] were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the multitude, and laid hands on him [so the precaution taken to satisfy the prejudices of weak brethren brought upon Paul the deadly enemies of the faith], crying out, Men of Israel, help :

28. This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place : and moreover he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place.

29. For they had [G., "there were who had"] before seen [cf. the "saw" of ver. 27] with him in the city [cf. "in the temple" of ver. 27, and "into the temple" of ver. 28] Trophimus the Ephesian, whom they supposed [and then asserted as a fact, and then multiplied into the "Greeks" of ver. 28] that Paul had brought into the temple.

30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together : and they laid hold of Paul, and dragged him out of the temple : and straightway the doors were shut [that the temple might not be defiled with Paul's blood].

31. And as they were seeking to [trying to (by beating)] kill him, tidings came [to the castle of Antonia, bordering on the N. W. side of the temple] up to the chief captain of the band ["tribune of the cohort"], that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

32. And forthwith he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down upon them, and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, left off beating Paul.

33. Then the chief captain came near, and laid hold on him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains [measure necessary for immediate security of Paul and appeasement of the multitude] ; and inquired who he was, and what he had done.

34. And some shouted [word only used besides in reference to Christ, Luke xxiii. 21, and Herod, ch. xii. 22] one thing, some another, among the crowd : and when he could not know the certainty for the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the castle.

35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the crowd :

36. For the multitude of the people followed after crying out, Away with him [same word Luke xxiii. 18].

37. And as Paul was about to be brought into the castle, he saith [in Greek] unto the chief captain, May I say something unto thee? And he said, Dost thou know Greek?

38. Art thou not then [G., "Not then thou art," *i.e.*, Thou art not. Paul's Greek disabused the tribune of the idea that he was] the Egyptian, which before these days stirred up to sedition and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins ["banditti," lit. daggermen. This "Mahdi" of Nero's reign led his followers to the Mount of Olives, where they were to have seen the walls of Jerusalem fall down. He was defeated by Felix, the worthless procurator in whose time banditti, "the Assassins," became a recognized profession]?

39. But Paul said, I am a Jew, of Tarsus, in Cilicia [a Greek colony], a citizen of no mean city; and I beseech thee, give me leave to speak unto the people.

40. And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with the hand unto the people; and when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew [the *Syro-Chaldaic* dialect, 1, 19] language, saying,

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

VERY tender are these words, "an old disciple," which you find in the 16th verse. What is the meaning of the expression? Had Mnason been a long time in the Church, or was he an old man who, late in life, had embraced the Christian faith? Let us take it that he had been a believer for a long time. You do not find such men giving up the faith. It is very seldom that an old Christian takes off his Christianity, lays it down like an out-worn garment and says, "That is of no further use." I have never known any such case. Christianity grows in its hold upon the human heart as the years run away. It is dearer to the old disciple than it can be to the young scholar; he has seen more of it, enjoyed its sweetness more, felt the need of it more, seen its power to sustain and help all human life more. Very seldom—I could use a more emphatic term—does the old believer turn away from the Cross and say he has believed a lie. That circumstance ought to have its weight as a matter of evidence. Whatever will bear well the wear and tear of human life ought to be spoken of respectfully. You speak well of a wall that stands against all weathers year after year—a wall which the wind has not blown

down, which the floods have not washed away. Laying your hand upon it with somewhat of affection, you say, "This is the right sort of building; this is the kind of building they used to put up in olden times." Surely you might say as much about the Christian faith, which never fails; always most when we need it most, whispering when we cannot bear loud speaking; speaking loudly when our attention has wandered far; finding us water in the wilderness and food in stony places. We ought to be able to speak as affectionately about that as about a wall that has stood through wind and rain, and laying our hand upon it, we should say with tender affection, "This is the thought that has comforted me night and day—the eternal, the unchangeable thought—the friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Decency ought to have some claim upon civilized men.

Take it that he was an old man when he embraced the Christian faith. Then there is hope for some who have not yet laid hold upon it. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" If you were enemies, we could deal with you as such; but you are not enemies; you hover, merely falter; you cannot leave us, you look in again. What is the meaning of that? Let the heart answer. The enemy will whisper to you, "It is too late now; you are too old; keep away." But all that is sweetest in human history and in the experience of living Christians would say, "On the contrary; make the most of your time; the day is far spent, the door is still open, go in now." Here is a faith that will condescend to the weakest, accept no patronage from the strongest, tarry for the old cripple that wants to catch the king's chariot. Now is the day of salvation!

When Paul and his friends went up to Jerusalem "the brethren received them gladly." I am not sure about that; they never have been received gladly up to this moment. The gladness admitted of being stated in one half-line—"the brethren received us gladly." A kind of sentence put in to help a sentence; a few words added to help the rhythm of the expression; a scattering of syllables to help the scanning of the blank verse—I have no particular faith in that gladness. More would have been said about it; Paul never did content himself with half a line when he was recognizing the kindness of his friends. Read this letter to the Philippians, and tell me if in one half-line he dismisses all the

Philippian love. They never liked Paul at Jerusalem. He was too big for any one city ; he did not go up to Jerusalem in the sense of approaching some majestic place that common people might hardly touch ; he descended upon it, and even the bishop and elders did not understand his humble haughtiness.

Paul saluted James and all the elders, and “ declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it they glorified the Lord.” I feel uncertain about that. There is a piety that disgusts me. Presently we shall know the meaning of their glorification of God. They might have said something to Paul ; that battered old warrior was worthy of having a kiss on the right cheek and on the left cheek and on the scarred forehead. There is a way of turning from a man that you may pray, when you ought first to have thrown your arms around him, and said, “ God bless thee, old warrior ! grand old fighter, soldier of the Cross ; come, let us kneel together and together pray.” Beware of cold piety, of ceremonial prayer, of turning the happiest incidents of life into state occasions, whereupon you must address the Lord as if he were an ivory deity. A little more humanity at Jerusalem would have done no harm ; but Jerusalem is forgotten : Paul remains. James and the elders are little more than names. Paul has a seat in every room in the house, and when the house has most to give him he is most welcome. A little humanity in the Church would do the Church no harm. A little recognition of merit, a kindly reference to loving service done by man to man, friend to friend, helps the wheel of life to run round more smoothly. It would be so at home if you would say how thankful you are, how pleased with what has been done for you, and how kind it was to think about you at all. Your house would become a sweet home, and every busy worker in it would forget weariness in thankfulness for the appreciation shown.

They could not have been so greatly occupied with the glory of God, for they instantly proposed to Paul to do something that was of the nature of a compromise, and they said, with such whining and broken voices, “ Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe ; and they are all zealous of the law : and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they

ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together, for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee——.” Not the language of bishops. There the Church goes down. That spirit is still abroad amongst us; we are bound to the letter, and we are saying of men of free spirit and Pauline heart, “As for us, we are all right with regard to them; but there is a general impression abroad that they are not orthodox.” “Be quiet—or say something—make a speech—read a paper—attend a service—nothing, nothing in the report, but do this.” Was there ever such a craven-hearted thing as a Church with this note in its throat? The great Apostle had to prove himself to a number of anonymous Jews to be right in spirit! The men who are buried in a crowd, in a grave no man can find, were tacitly if not distinctly to dictate the policy of the world’s greatest Christian prince and hero! But James had lived a long time in the metropolis; he seldom went from home; he was a man that could not bear a noise, and he would offer on the altar of prejudice this oblation. It was not right, but Paul will not hinder the great cause; Paul, who is seventy-fold more of a bishop than James could ever be, was willing to become “all things to all men,” that he might by any means save some. We can imagine the smile of the heart as he consented to be “one of five,” to go through certain customs and ceremonies in order to prove himself orthodox—a thing which a man can never be by mere observance and outward ceremony. Orthodoxy does not consist in doing certain things, but in doing something in the soul. It is the soul that is orthodox, not the custom that is approved.

But when did Paul ever sacrifice the greater to the less? He seems to have said to himself, “If any good can be done in this way, I am willing to do it. I have made my position distinct in Jerusalem before to-day, and I have acted upon the whole meaning of that position all this time; but if any real and substantial good can be done by this proposed course, I am willing to undergo it.” But course-men were not to be so satisfied. “Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple. . . . And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on

him, crying out, Men of Israel, help : This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place." In the very act of attempting to prove himself orthodox, to people who had no right to judge his orthodoxy, he was seized as a hypocrite. The temple was no protection. It suits some men to believe others to be hypocrites rather than to give them credit for good intentions, instead of saying, "We have been misinformed about this man, here he is submitting to the law of Moses actually in the temple itself ; let us apologize to him : put out our hands to him, and say, 'Brother, we have been mistaken.' " You cannot satisfy black-mailers ; pay them what you like to-day, they will return to-morrow. There are black-mailers in the Church as well as in the world. You can never live holy enough to put an end to their censure, their malice, their diabolism of spirit ; they want more ; they demand it in savage tones ; they reject all the life that has been lived ; and your last prayer on earth—be it the mightiest ever breathed from the lips of man—will be counted nothing by the black-mailer, who would rather you were in hell than in heaven. Never submit to them : never treat with them ; never offer to go an inch with them ! Resist beginnings ; stand upon the eternal right and say, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" What applies to character applies also to argument. There are black-mailers in controversy ; they want to hear the argument stated again, increased, enhanced, continually enlarged. When you have satisfied Aristotle with your logic, you have not begun to touch the black-mailer ; he does not want the logic, he wants to torment the logician.

It will go badly with Paul then but for the State. I thank God for the State as well as for the Church. James and the elders will not do much for Paul now, for, dear old gentlemen ! they did not like noise. There is a time when the State must assert its authority. "The chief captain of the band" was told "that all Jerusalem was in an uproar ;" so he "immediately took soldiers and centurions" (they were the only arguments he could recognize) "and ran down upon them ;" and when the mob "saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul." Cowards ! And these were the men that Paul was asked to conciliate ! He had been told respecting them that, if he would only shave his

head and go in the temple for a while, all the people would be quiet and respectful and would recognize him. To be recognized by them was an intolerable patronage.

“ Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains ; and demanded who he was and what he had done.” The State knows nothing about Christian ministers. It seems comical—sweetly and piously amusing—to hear the chief captain. I love him already for his innocent ignorance. Said he, “ Art thou not that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?” You think the State knows you—not a hair of your head ; never heard of you. You go forward as a Congregationalist, and what does the State know about a “ Congregationalist ” ? You will be mistaken for an Egyptian that made an uproar once, and went out into the wilderness with four thousand men that were murderers ! You don’t suppose the chief captains of the band know anything about Congregationalists, or prayer-meetings, or ministers’ meetings, or deacons’ meetings ? There is no rebuke perhaps more humbling than an inquiry as to your identity by men whom you thought respected you, and knew all about you. Do not make that mistake. A senator of this country asked me, with a verdant innocence, if mine was the only Congregational church in London—a man who voted upon ecclesiastical questions, and was supposed, by virtue of his office and position, to have a good deal to do with the adjustment of ecclesiastical matters. It would be amusing to Paul to be mistaken for an Egyptian ; a kind of grim delight would be in his old heart as he was thought to be the leader of a murderous band. He, who had not been ashamed of the Gospel of Christ ; he, who had held the Cross aloft, until by its lustre it had put out suns and stars ; he, whose life had been a daily sacrifice ; he, who died daily for Christ, coming back from the wars, was mistaken by the State for an Egyptian, which had made an uproar long ago, and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers. Never mind ; Paul owed the State a good deal in this instance. Paul was more indebted to the Romans than to the Jews in this matter. The State will see justice done to us. The State holds the property in which we are now assembled, as certainly as it holds any church that is supposed

primarily to belong to it. The State will not allow this property with which we ourselves are associated to be diverted from its proper purpose ; to be handed over to people who have no right to it : to whatever may be done inside the walls in the matter of prostituting the property, the State will say, " This must not be done." So with human life. Thank God for civilized States.

LXXXIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, is there not a rest provided for them that love thee—a long Sabbath day without cloud and without night? Hast thou not told us that far beyond there is home-land? By these promises art thou taking us forward day by day, that we may enter into light and enjoy the warmth and the peace of eternal summer. Because of this comfort we are lifted up above all distresses; we speak of them as for the time only; we say, they come and go, and there is no stay in them; we fear them not; they are dying shadows, flying clouds, specks that vanish whilst we look upon them. We could not say this but for the promise of eternal life and endless joy—service without weariness, attention unbroken to things Divine, amounting to rapture and all heavenliness of joy. This is thy gift in Christ Jesus. We are not walking from the light into darkness, but from darkness into light; wherefore we comfort one another with these words of thine: we say, “the road will not be long; another mile or two at the most, and the journey will be done; a few more years, and earth will be behind us—a spot undiscernible in space.” So are we taken forward, step by step, a day at a time; feeling warmer to-day than yesterday, because the Sabbath life is nearer. Surely this is thy voice; surely this is the light above the brightness of the sun that makes men blind at noon-day, that afterward they may receive their inner and spiritual sight. This is thy gift, O Christ! meeting every man on the road, and smiting him to the ground that there he may leave his pride and rise up a humble child led by the hand. We bless thee for all these views of things unseen. We thank thee with swelling hearts of thankfulness because of these touches of a hand that may be felt but never seen. We bless thee with hymn upon hymn—yea, in multiplied psalm—for this religious light that looks with holy contempt upon all the charms and vexations of time, and draws itself forward by the mighty welcomes and gospels of heaven. Help us to know what we are, what we can do, what is thy purpose concerning us; and may we with all diligence and burning love gird ourselves to our work, and be found at the last willing, obedient, active servants, waiting for one advent—the Lord; and the solution of all things, the coming of the Lord. Meanwhile, we have thy Book, but how seldom have we eyes to see it. We have thy written Word, but how rarely do we pass through the iron gate into the inner spirit and the sacred liberty. This is our blame; we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. O that we had hearkened unto thy

statutes and walked in the way of thy commandments, and held our expectant life steadily towards the rising of the sun. Then had our peace flowed like a river, and our righteousness had been as the waves of the sea, and all the hurried week of the world's tumult would have been calmed by the peace of thine own Son. Meanwhile, we see thy providence passing before us day by day. We see that the axe is laid unto the root of the tree. Again and again we are startled by visions of righteousness and of sure and holy judgment amongst the lives of men. If we are perplexed by mystery, we are comforted by many a revelation. We see that thou art at war with the wicked man. If thou dost lift him up a little, it is to throw him down more heavily; if thou dost apparently show him favour, it is that he may the more surely know and feel the judgment of thy righteousness. We see that the righteous man is still loved of God and held fast in his right hand, educated by manifold discipline and instruction, but always being prepared for the high estate reserved in Christ Jesus for all whose hearts have lost their self-will in simple faith. We pray for one another, again and again, for our life is one daily need; our course is full of pain; we cannot do without thee one little day. Keep us, and we shall be kept; let thine hand be upon us, and we shall be as crowned kings. Regard the old and the young alike; thou canst make the old young; thou canst make the young maturer. Thou canst find for us water in the wilderness; show us the dripping of honey amongst hard rocks. The Red Sea is nothing before the rod of the Lord, and the wilderness is but the beginning of a garden when the Lord's love and light are in our hearts. So take us every one—spotted, crooked, self-spoiled—only now: broken-hearted, joyous, penitent—whatever our condition be—lay open wide the door—wider still—set it open thyself, thou Loving One; and all shall enter in, and falling down at thy feet, low before the Saviour's Cross, shall cry bitterly that they ever grieved thine heart. Amen.

Acts xxii. 1-21.

1. Brethren [Paul's address to his *kinsmen* in the *mother tongue*] and fathers [Sanhedrists], hear ye the defence which I now make unto you [lit. "hear of me my present defence to you"].

2. And when they heard that he spake unto them in the Hebrew language they were the [still (xxi. 40)] more quiet: and he saith,

3. I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of [the Jewish teachers sat upon an elevated chair, *Vit. Syn.*, p. 165 f.] Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers [*i.e.*, *Mosaicallly* orthodox. Paul's defence is not based upon traditions, Gal. i. 14, or Pharisaism, Phil. iii. 5], being zealous [G., "a zealot"] for God, even as ye all are this day.

4. And I persecuted this way [ix. 2 al.] unto the death [the persecutor's intent], binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5. As also the high-priest [of that time : still living] doth bear me witness, and all the estate of [G. "Eldership:" probably syn. with Sanhedrim] the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and journeyed to Damascus, to bring them also which were there unto Jerusalem in bonds, for to be punished.

6. And it came to pass that [ix. 3-8 ; xxvi. 13 ff.] as I made my journey, and drew nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light [seen on the background of noon] round about me.

7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

8. And I answered, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9. And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go unto Damascus ; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light [In. 1. 18 ; Ps. civ. 2 ; 1 Tim. vi. 16], being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there,

13. Came unto me, and standing by me [sitting blind, unable to open eyelids] said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And in that very hour I looked up on [G. "unto"] him.

14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed [iii. 20] thee to know his will and to see the Righteous One [*Jesus*, on whom God's *righteous* volition to save bases itself, Rom. iii. 21, ff. ; 2 Cor. v. 21], and to hear a voice from his mouth.

15. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

16. And now why tarriest thou ? Arise and be baptized, and [symbolically] wash away thy sins, calling on His name [1 Cor. vi. 11].

17. And it came to pass that when I had returned to Jerusalem [sequel, not related at ix. 26], and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance,

18. And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem : because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning me.

19. And I said [Paul would have made his *début* as the "Converted Persecutor." But Christ forbade], Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee.

20. And when the blood of Stephen, thy witness, was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting, and keeping the garments of them that slew him.

21. And he said to me, Depart : for I ["I," emphatic] will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles [among Gentiles].

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

WE wonder what speech Paul will now make. Will he enter into some learned theological argument and confound his hearers by his heavenly eloquence? What will he say under circumstances partly novel, severely critical? He will surely bring to bear the pressure of his whole intellectual force; he will make this the supreme occasion of a lifetime, and will contribute to it all that he has ever learned of earthly wisdom, and all that he has ever known of heavenly or spiritual experience. We await the opening of those eloquent lips with feverish expectancy, for this is a critical hour. The audience is, in many respects, unlike any other audience the Apostle has ever addressed, and he is now in the metropolis of the land. What is his defence? He tells over again the story of his conversion, and tells nothing more. The sublimity of that act is without parallel in the Christian ministry. Here is no elaborate argument, no penetrating criticism, no show of erudition, but a simple, child-like statement of facts; the application being to this effect: "Men, brethren, and fathers, after this, what could I do?" This is the key that opens the lock; that is the answer to the problem. "I myself actually passed through these experiences, and having passed through them, what other could I do than I have done? Have I not acted under the pressure of a Divine predestination?" We wondered how the old story of the conversion was bearing the wear and tear of Apostolic life; the answer is before us. Having gone down into the city and into the wilderness, and over the sea; having been beaten and stoned and imprisoned, and having had heaped upon him all obloquy, the Apostle ends just where he began: by telling, not the story of another man, but the simple experience of his own soul. The story is just the same. Sometimes imagination plays havoc with memory; sometimes we begin to wonder if our own life is true; there comes a time when we say, "Surely we were in a trance then; that cannot be just as we once thought it was." Imagination throws its own colours upon the simplest facts of early life, and we begin to regard those facts as

part of an impalpable and mocking dream. This is particularly the case with the religious imagination ; it leads us to disown our early selves ; it teaches us to regard our first prayers as passionate and sentimental rather than as sober and vital. The religious imagination, when not kept under severe control, trifles with facts and makes us think that even history itself is only a coloured cloud. It is interesting, therefore, to find that Paul, after all the manifold and peculiar experience of a missionary's life, turns up at this moment and repeats the old story exactly as it occurred in the earlier part of his life. Paul lived in his own experience ; Paul placed both his feet on the rock of facts which had occurred in his own knowledge. He was not without poetic fire ; he was not destitute of religious imagination ; but to what height soever his head soared, he always kept his feet firmly upon the rock of things which had happened to himself. That is the perpetual vindication of Christianity. Christianity is not to be defended by mere argument, by the able use of elegant terms and subtle phrases ; Christianity does not challenge the world to a battle of opinions. Christianity is an incarnation ; it stands up in its own living men, and says, " This is my work. If you want me to talk with you mere opinions and views and theories, you can answer me back—wisely or unwisely as you may suppose ; but the controversy which I have with the world is this : produce your men and I will produce mine." The tree is known by its fruit.

So the Apostle Paul continually told what Jesus Christ had done for him. If the Church would stand firmly to this one point, there need be no controversy. This speech of the great Apostle does not refer to something that happened once for all in one man's life alone ; this is but the specimen speech ; every Christian man can make a similar speech for himself, sealed with the authority of his own consciousness and experience. That is the only sermon the world wants from any of us. Stand up and say where you were going, what you were, and what you are now. If in an unfortunate mood you refer to some other man's case, you may be perplexed by some cross inquiry as to the order of the facts ; but if you keep to your own self—your own very self—there is no answer, unless the world should add to the vulgarity of its rudeness this additional aggravation : that it calls you a speaker of falsehoods. It never occurred to the Apostle that he was relating anything that

ought to tax the imagination of his hearers ; about the whole recital there is the tone of a sober annalist, the tone of a man who is simply telling what he saw, heard, felt, and enjoyed. The recital of those occurrences he called his "defence." The defence of Christianity is not a book but a man—not an argument but a life. Christians are the defence of Christianity. Of course we shall be told about the shortcomings of Christians, their defects, their eccentricities, their sins. So be it. We may admit the impeachment in every item, and still the solid truth remains that Christians are the defence of Christianity. The taunt admits of easy and destructive retort. You tell me that London is a healthy city ! Come with me to the hospitals to-day and let us walk upstairs, and downstairs, and along the corridors, and call in at every room in every ward, and I will show you every disease known amongst men in this climate. And yet we are told that London is a healthy city ! Come with me from house to house throughout the metropolis, and in nearly every house I will find you a complaining voice—someone is sick, someone feels pain. And yet they tell us that London is a healthy city ! Let their hospitals confound them ; and let all the invalids at home combine in one well-attested refutation of this optimistic view of London as the healthiest great city in the world. That kind of argument would not be admitted on sanitary questions ; yet the very men, who would probably reject it upon the ground of a physical kind, might be tempted to use it in relation to Christians. There are sick Christians, Christian cripples, bad men in many respects, weak men in all respects, faulty men ; and yet it remains true that Christians are the defence of Christianity ; and even the weakest Christian may have about him that peculiar sign manual of heaven, which makes him greater than the greatest born of women outside the circle described with blood.

Here, then, is the plain line along which we must move when called upon for our defence. We must not ask our friends to contribute a library out of which we may cull the many evidences which establish the Christian argument ; but, standing forward on stair-top, or in the market-place, or in the Church, let us say, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence"—then will come your own life-story. We do not need much poetic genius to dictate on the spot a hundred varying tales, each of which

would be an invincible argument on the side of Christianity. "Men, brethren, and fathers," says some poor old mother in the Church, "hear ye my defence. I was left in difficulty and trouble and sorrow; I knew not where to turn: all heaven was a cloud, all the earth was a swamp; I sat down and felt the pain of utter helplessness, when suddenly I heard a voice saying unto me, 'Pray to thy Father in heaven.' I looked and saw no man; and whilst I was looking the voice said again, 'Pray to thy Father in heaven.' I never had prayed just in the right way; but, at that moment, my heart dissolved in softness, and my eye brightened with hope, and I fell down, and, crying unto heaven, asked the Lord to show me what he would have me to do. Suddenly there was a great light around me, and a hand took hold of mine, and ever since that day I have felt that I am not an orphan, or a lost thing, or a forsaken life, but under shepherdly and fatherly superintendence; I feel that the very hairs of my head are all numbered." Sweet old mother! sit down; the philosophers can never answer that; bless thee! that is a speech to which there is no reply. Have you no tale to tell about the dark days, the friendless days; the sudden suggestion that stirred the mind; the inspiration like a flash of light at midnight; the key you found in the darkness when you put your hand out which has unlocked every gate and every door ever since? Stand up and tell your tale. Let me not hear your opinions and your views and conjectures and speculations—keep them to yourself; but when we call for your defence read out of the pages of your heart. Every man has his own defence, his own particular vision or view of God. What we want to hear from each man is what he himself knows. Keep to facts—they are the noblest poetry; keep to facts—they are the blossoms that no cold wind can blow down, but must mature into luscious and nutritious fruit. Herein is the strength of some of us; herein is the secret of our ardent preaching. Were we to preach what we have read, were we to preach from the purely intellectual and argumentative point, we are keen enough in spiritual hearing to detect noises in the air, challenging us at a thousand points; but standing back in our own selfhood, we see it all, and so complete is our consciousness and experience that it never occurs to us any man can doubt our word. This will be the case with Paul. When he argued about the resurrection, he

said with infinite simplicity, "If it were not so, we ourselves would be found liars before God, and that is impossible." The sweet truthfulness, the simple, beautiful self-conviction of soul in that testimony! We need no certificate after that; it comes so freshly, in a certain sense so naïvely, and with such a heavenliness of simplicity as to be in itself a very powerful argument. It is possible to account for the greatest changes in life; it is not always possible to complete an argument; it is not always possible to put into words the feelings which have made us what we are. There are silent defences; there are defences which only speak as the light speaks, and that is by wordless shining; nevertheless, the man himself knows in his own heart the truth of what he would say if words were equal to the occasion. If you have any doubt in your own heart, it must be about yourself and not about the truth. Why do men fly upon the truth, as if that were to blame, instead of flying upon their own incomplete experience, and saying, "The fault is in me"? If you are not a converted man—a man whose soul has been turned right round—then blame your own want of conversion, and not the truth which you nominally profess. A converted man is one who is completely turned right round in every act, motive, impulse, and purpose; a converted man is as one who was travelling east, but is now marching straight towards the west. You could tell what turned you round—it was a death, a grief, a reading of the Book, a sermon, a singular providence, the hearing of a hymn, the touch of a child, the feeling of an inward agony. That is your defence; it is not mine; it is not another man's, probably, but it is yours, just as your heart is yours, and your hand. Your heart and hand have something in common with every other human heart and hand, yet there is a speciality that makes each yours and no other man's. It is so in Christian experience. Every man has his own view of God, his own conception of the Cross, his own speechless explanation of the inexplicable mystery of the Atonement of Christ. We want more personal experience in the Church. Herein the idea of some Christian communions is a sound conception of Christian fellowship and communion, namely: that we should meet one another periodically, and audibly say what God has done for the soul. The practice may easily be abused; it is not our business to show how Christian privileges may be degraded, but how they

may be turned to the highest advantage ; and, judging by apostolic history and precedent, nothing is so convincing, so satisfactory, as for the soul to tell its own story, in its own words, and when the soul does that, the best of all sermons will be preached. We can say, " We were as sheep going astray, but now we are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." Each can say, who has known Christ's ministry in the soul, " Once I was blind ; now I see." Each can say, " I have altered my standard of judgment, my whole estimate of things ; the world used to be a great place to me, now I can hardly see it : my eyes are filled with another glory—a glory that excelleth ; and now when I look down upon the earth, I see in it nothing but types, shadows, symbols of better things ; once I thought time long, now it is only a short hot breath ; once I thought life a daily pain, now it is a daily expectation. Death is abolished. O death ! O death ! grim death—where is thy sting, thou defeated foe, thou overthrown one ?" What wrought this ? " It was wrought thus : I was going from Jerusalem to Damascus, and at noonday, in a light which put out the sun, Jesus of Nazareth met me, talked to me, spoke to my very soul ; and if any man were to deny that, he would be a liar, not I. I know it ; it is my life's life ; it is the fact which is the keystone of my life's bridge ; it is the stone that gives unity to the present and hope for the future. Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence ! My defence is not an argument which you can answer, but a fact to which I can swear."

LXXXIV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are thy children, and would make a child's speech unto thee, every one in his own need and in his own sin. Every one of us has a need of his own and also a sin which he cannot lay at the door of others. Thou knowest us within and without—yea, thou dost know our thought before it is fully formed, and thou dost hear the word whilst it is yet but a thought. We cannot run away from the glory of thy light ; there is no spot which it does not brighten. We cannot escape God—"Thou, God, seest me." All things are naked and open unto thine eyes ; there is no concealment, there is no darkness, there is no sure hiding. We stand in the light of thine eye all the day and all the night ; this is our joy as well as our fear. Thou knowest us altogether. Thou knowest what we are, what we sprang from, what are our temptations and peculiarities, and thou wilt judge righteous judgment. In wrath thou wilt remember mercy, and in thy sword is measure ; thou wilt not forget that we are but dust. We have come with the new song in our mouth, because of the new mercy that is in our life. The song is not first : it is second. We cannot overtake the Lord ; we cannot outrun the Almighty. The mercy is always first ; the song comes too long afterward. Thy mercy is a great mountain, a shining sun, a river full of water and infinite comfort—yea, it is all things beautiful and rich and good in one sublime donation. Because of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed ; because of the Lord's compassion we have yet a lot and portion in the land and a memorial amongst the living. This is the Lord's daily goodness ; this is the perpetual miracle of love : behold ! this also is part of the redeeming ministry of heaven. Thou dost redeem us with blood every day ; the Cross is still here : we see it, touch it, read its meaning—so full of love—and bow down before its sacrifice as the one thing needed to deliver us from the infinite guilt and burden of sin. Keep us near the Cross ; there is healing in that tree, there is safety in that refuge, there is hope in that light. Keep us closer still to the tree on which the Saviour died. We would plant no tree of our own ; we would make no refuge of our own invention ; we would flee unto the Lord's own Cross, and, knowing no other answer to thy law, we would rest there, and there find the peace which passeth understanding. Thou hast given each of us work to do, and thou hast given us strength to do it with. Help each of us to know his exact duty and to do it, not with one hand, but with both hands, and with both hands earnestly, as if the whole struggle depended upon us ;

and then, having done what in us lies, may we find the rest of good service and sacred industry in the blessing of heaven. We thank thee that we lift up our eyes beyond the dust ; we thank thee for the voices within, which will not let us rest in a mean life ; we are glad because of the discontent which afflicts us with holy trouble ; it is our immortality, it is the presence of the Divine One in our heart, it is the inspiration of God. Prevent us from settling down upon the emptiness of this earth and the uselessness of the honours and gifts of dying time. We seek a city out of sight. We would declare plainly that we are but pilgrims and can only tarry for an hour and then rise to pursue the mysterious journey. Help us whilst using the earth not to abuse it, to handle it right wisely with the prudence of heavenly wisdom—the large-mindedness which comes of Divine inspiration. For all thy love, we bless thee. We put out our hand towards thee in token of homage ; we bow down before the Lord, not with servile fear, but with an abasement of soul which comes of overflowing gratitude and unspeakable reverence and love. Continue thy goodness to us for the few miles more of life's little journey. Be with those who are far down the hill—not far from the gate which opens upon the acre of the dead. Be with those who are on the top of the hill, shouting in the fulness of their strength, and show them that their way now lies gently downward. Be with all who are struggling towards the top—often weary, out of breath, longing to lie down, willing to find a grave even on the youth-side of life's great hill. Give them courage, newness of hope, confidence in God, and may they rise to pursue the journey like men who have been refreshed at the heavenly banquet. Show us again and again somewhat of life's mystery that we may be sober, and that we may chasten ourselves and know that we are but men who can read only a little of thy will and who soon forget what they read. Then touch our hearts secretly and surprise us into such little joys and passing delight as may recover us from irreligious dejection, and give us hope that one day we shall stand amongst those on whose bright faces there is no sign of sorrow. The Lord give us hold of the upper world ; the Lord take our hearts up into heaven and feed them there and send them back to the earth to despise its enticements, but to do its work with willing obedience. Comfort our sick ones at home ; give them Sabbath twice over in the quiet of their own chambers ; whilst they wonder that they are not in their accustomed place, may the whole house in which they dwell become doubly sacred to them because of spiritual presences and ministrations. Cause their health to return and their hope to be re-established, and bring them back to us again longing to make up for work left undone. The Lord to whom the sea belongs look upon all who are now upon it ; give them good voyaging, sleep at night, joy by day, health all the twenty-four hours, and bring them to their desired haven singing a new song, blessing the Providence which saved them. Be with all our dear ones in the colonies, in the distant parts of the earth amongst strange people speaking unfamiliar tongues. Why these separations ? Why these divi-

sions? May we be chastened and sanctified by the influence arising from such thinking and doing good, hope that through the blood of the everlasting covenant—the blood precious in the sight of heaven—we shall all be gathered together into one bright heaven—the summer-land, unvisited by winter, never touched by chilling frost—the land of song and liberty, of purity and service, the mysterious land, the home of the blessed. Amen.

Acts xxii. 22-30.

22. And they gave him audience unto this word [xxi. 28]; and they lifted up their voice, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

23. And as they cried out, and threw off their garments, and cast dust into the air [stoning preliminaries],

24. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, bidding that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him.

25. And when they had tied him up with [G. "before," *i.e.*, ready for the thongs, the scourges], Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

26. And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain, and told him, saying, What art thou about to do? for this man is a Roman.

27. And the chief captain [tribune] came, and said unto him [for he would know that a native of Tarsus had not, *as such*, the right of citizenship], Tell me, art thou [Gr. "thou," emphatic used in contemptuous surprise] a Roman? And he said, Yea.

28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum of money [G. "capital"] obtained I this citizenship [Dio. Cass. lx. 17 and al. relate the frequent sale of the citizenship at this epoch—an oft-ridiculed abuse—to fill the exchequer]. And Paul said [answering the contempt], But I am a Roman born [hereditary citizenship nobler than that obtained by purchase. Moreover, Paul's ancestor probably obtained it by the exercise of some noble magistracy].

29. They then which were about to examine [scourge] him straightway departed from him: and the chief captain also was afraid, when he knew that he was a Roman and because he had [was in the position of having] bound him.

30. But on the morrow, desiring to know the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him [the haughty tribune had left him bound when the scourging was intermitted, his pride, in spite of his fear (ver. 29), not allowing him to go back upon his own act], and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

THE POINT OF SECESSION.

PAUL calls this speech his defence. That defence we have already examined line by line. We were struck by the thought that the defence is not an intellectual argument, but a personal experience. We ventured to lay down the doctrine that personal testimony is the best defence alike of providence and redemption. Each man must say what he knows, and not concern himself with things that lie beyond his consciousness and outside his own experience. An interesting point occurs on the review of the defence, namely, that our conversion does not cause us to forget our past life. Paul recounts his earlier years with painfulness of detail and in tones which must have caused his heart no little suffering. Not one incident is forgotten ; nothing is kept back of all the dreary tale. The past is not a dead-letter in the memory of the converted man. He looks at it that he may receive instruction from it ; he remembers the hole of the pit out of which he was digged ; he says it does him good to go back to that mire and pit and look at beginnings, for it chastens his soul, it shows him new aspects of the goodness and the power of God, it lifts his prayers to a higher level, it chastens into noblest and strongest refinement all his desires and aspirations. The past is always to be the present, but only in a sense—not to rule over us, not to throw us into deep and nightly dejection, but to show on the other side the miracle of Divine love, the completeness of Divine deliverance, the perfectness of Divine wisdom. It would be convenient to forget the past ; it would, in many cases, be pleasant to have no past. But the days do not die in the nights : they are but planted in that dark soil to grow up and bear fruit on the shining morrow. Still, life would become intolerable if we could not deal in some other way with the past. Christianity deals intelligently with all our past career. It takes it up line by line, examines it in the light, it sets it down item by item, it adds it up into its total significance and value, and then it says as an accusing, as a charge of guilt upon the soul, as a pitiless creditor, "Thou art for that disabled and dispossessed." The past is still there—a book to be read, a figure to be looked at, a caution from which to learn wisdom ; but in its tormenting force, in its sting-

ing accusativeness, it is no longer the tyrant of our life. That is the mystery of faith, that is the mystery of forgiveness : that the things are still there, as things that did actually occur, but their moral relation to us is wholly and for ever changed. Who could stand a daily accumulating hell behind him ? God says, " Not any coal shall be added to that fire : the fire itself shall be put out, but the black ashes shall be full of meaning to the man who was once scorched by the fury of their flames." We are thankful for this ; it is a very gospel, it is a complete and glorious deliverance ; but for this, every day would bring its own burden, and the days all added up into one total would burn us with unquenchable fire. This is—let us say to our souls over and over again—the mystery of pardon, the miracle of forgiveness ; and if we are so constituted that we cannot forgive ourselves, yet is that self-unforgiveness, when properly managed and administered, an agent of real discipline and health to the soul that submits to it. Paul then, you observe, kept his past steadily before him, right away up from his birth and birthplace to the time when he bent his back for the last laceration—all things before him clearly, quotably, yet not accusingly. That our past should always be at our right hand, and yet have no power to stop our prayers, is the triumph of God ; that all the past should be near us, touching our very neck, and yet have no power of strangulation—this is the mystery of saving grace. We are thereby saved from suicide ; no man could stand the pressure of all his yesterdays ; if he were to open his mind to that pressure and let the full storm of his guilty days break upon his soul, he would be turned to despair or to self-slaughter. Here again—blessed be God !—here is the power that enables us to escape from the past, and turn the future through its suggestive and sobering influence into a better time. This is the only right way of dealing with the past. Do not escape it by any species of intoxication ; do not drown your conscience ; do not fill your ears with the unholy din that will silence the tones of the accusing angel ; you must fight that battle out upon holy ground. The aim is not to secure by narcotics what can only be secured by forgiveness. He who shuts his ears and says there is no noise is a foolish man ; he who closes his eyes when his house is on fire and says, " I do not see the flame, and therefore there is none," is a madman. The past must be intelligently dealt with—yea, I will

say philosophically—that is to say, its very heart must be pierced, its innermost quality must be known, and it must be dealt with on its merits and throughout the whole circle of its scope, and the only power known to me which can do that is the Cross and blood of Christ. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” I would begin every sermon with that sentence ; in every sermon that should be the loudest note ; every discourse should conclude with that solemn gospel.

The immediate point of the 22nd verse is hardly of less consequence. Paul was listened to attentively until he came to a certain word. What was that word ? You find it in the 21st verse : “I will send thee,” said the Lord, “far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live.” How some words madden men—single words, short words, but words pregnant with history and moral suggestion. We are not offended by the word “Gentiles,” otherwise we should be offended by our own name, for we indeed belong to the Gentile tribes ; but the ancient Jews were the enemies of the Gentiles—I am not speaking of modern Jews, who have lost nearly everything that makes a Jew, but of the ancient Jews—and they have written hatred in their books against the Gentiles ; they have written oaths that they themselves would rather not have any Messiah than a Messiah that had a kindly feeling towards the heathen : they would only have a Messiah for themselves ; and the books of the ancient Jews are full of cursing and swearing and bitterest language against all men who are not, or were not, Jews according to their definition of the term. This explains the fury of the mob : so long as Paul had a tale to tell they listened to him. Paul—a wise rhetorician—kept the burning word until the very last, but like a man skilled in speech, he got it quite out. The very place of this word in the great speech is a stroke of genius ; it is the last word, it is all there, but the moment it was uttered it was like a spark thrown into a magazine of gunpowder. It is curious to observe in the New Testament the points at which audiences break away from the speakers. Take the case of Jesus Christ himself ; one of his sublimest speeches you will find in John vi. In the course of that speech he becomes intensely spiritual ; in the 66th verse of the chapter we read, “From

that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." What time was that? It was the time of spiritual revelation. So long as there were parables to hear, and loaves and fishes to be divided, and miracles to be gazed upon and wondered at, there was no turning away; but when the Lord became intensely spiritual in his teaching, profoundly doctrinal, when he said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. . . . It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. . . . No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father,"—then they left him. This is a point which is often forgotten in estimating the influence of Christ's ministry. We are often told, "Preach like Jesus Christ, and the people will hear you gladly;" whereas the truth is that the moment Jesus Christ left the elements of teaching—the merely introductory and alphabetic points of teaching—the moment he came to deal with the real and eternal purpose of his teaching, the people left him. That must be the result of spiritual preaching everywhere. The world does not want spiritual preaching; the Church cannot understand spiritual preaching. If we were to speak spiritually, shaking off all accent and colour and mere form, the churches would be empty by necessity: we are obliged to keep on the outside, and show the great stones of the temple; we dare not go inside and touch the altar. The Athenians left Paul at another point. They listened to him with more or less interest when he made his great speech upon Mars' Hill, but the moment he began to speak about the resurrection of the dead, "some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter," with an ill-suppressed sneering laugh in their tone. They did not want to hear about the resurrection of the dead; they wanted philosophy, speculation, high discourse, poetry. So long as Paul kept himself to the exposition of a kind of theosophy, the Athenians listened to him, and thought he was an extraordinary man,

notwithstanding the novelty of his appearance ; but when he spoke of the resurrection of the dead, they mocked. In this particular instance another point of departure is chosen. The Jews listened unto Paul so long as he related incidents and confined himself to matters which were, more or less, of a purely Jewish kind ; but the moment he said " Gentiles," they went mad, cried out, cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, and were in a fury of resentment.

The great teaching of this review is that all men part company with their teachers at certain points. The point is not always the same : some remained with Jesus, notwithstanding the spirituality of his teaching ; some heard about the resurrection of the dead with comparative interest, for they themselves had some leaning in the direction of that doctrine ; others could hear about the Gentiles with mental composure ; there was nothing in the word itself to unbalance their equilibrium. But the lesson is, that there are points at which we all fly off. There are points which would dissolve this assembly in a moment, to which we dare not, or may not, refer. Men always like to listen to themselves preaching ; it is not the teacher who preaches, but the people who, accepting his monotonous and indisputable platitudes, are themselves preaching through him, and the more energetic he is the more comfortable they are. But who dare speak the new word, start the new thought, break away into the new direction, shake off the accepted, and enter neglected paths, and carve, under what is believed to be Divine inspiration, new and broader paths of progress ? Look at this particular case : what was the disease under which these people were suffering ? The eternal disease of humanity, which is narrow-mindedness. It is distressing, were it not for a kind of sad comedy that runs through it and puckers it into a kind of unholy laughter, to see how we rebuke narrow-mindedness in others, and practise it with religious fidelity ourselves. I know not how the difficulty is to be met. The moment the Jews heard the word " Gentiles " they would hear no more of Apostolic eloquence. The man who could entertain a kindly interest towards the Gentiles was a " fellow " " not fit to live." That was called religious earnestness, religious zeal, contention for the faith once delivered to the saints ! Are there any against whom we cry out ? Have we learned Christ's great lesson : " Other

sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring " ? Have we left the ninety-and-nine accepted ideas in the wilderness and gone out after that which is lost, until we find it ? Are we shepherds or bigots ? men of progress or men of retrogression ? I do not ask for new truth, for there is none and can be none ; I do not ask for a " new theology," for that were a contradiction in terms—theology, properly understood, is an eternal quantity. I ask for great-heartedness—all but infinite heartedness, that will listen to all kinds of people, hoping that in the course of their talk they will drop the one word which the great Teacher can take up and magnify into a gospel. Save us ! O Saviour of the world ! our Lord Christ Jesus, from the spirit that listens for the other word, which we can work up into an indictment. If any man has a prophecy, let us hear it ; if any man has a saying, let us listen to it ; if any man has a new reading of the old Book, let us hear him. A tone may be a lesson ; an emphasis may be equal to a revelation. We lose so much when we are narrow, unsympathetic, bigoted. The only condition of mind which Jesus Christ can approve is a condition of all hopeful love. Is that a mere sentiment ? Far from it, for nothing can burn with so intense a wrath against all evil as holy love. Indifference cannot be angry. Love has two looks—like the mysterious wheel in the great ancient darkness—one look of benignity, warmth, hopefulness, and benediction towards all who want to be better and to pray the large prayer ; and the other look that strikes off the hoops of iron from the wheels of the enemy—the piercing, blighting look, the face of holy anger that will have no truce, or parleying, or compromise with any child of darkness. Let us take care how we condemn the narrow-mindedness of men who lived nineteen centuries since, and then practise it in some other form ourselves. Let our prayer be for larger roads, swifter progress, ampler light, more courage, more hope.

LXXXV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, hast thou not said, "What is thy petition? and what is thy request? and it shall be granted unto thee"? We answer thy challenge of love by telling thee somewhat of our painful need. We cannot tell thee all our want, for our life is one long necessity. Thou alone canst understand the mystery of our continual void. Our heart aches for something not born of time; our soul hath a desire which space cannot satisfy. We pray without words; we look great wonders and expectations which we cannot put into speech. We are groping for something; we are in the dark and cannot tell the beginning or the end. We listen if we may hear a sound going in the wind; we look as if we might perhaps see some gentle presence in the cloud. We cannot tell what we are; we affright ourselves. The Lord come to us in his own way, and the light will come with him, and, though for one moment the glory may strike us blind, we shall afterwards feel his fingers upon our closed eyelids; then shall they be opened and we shall see clearly. In the name of Jesus Christ, thy Son, loved of God, dying for men, grant unto us to know that this is thy purpose concerning us—to open our eyes that we may see thyself. May all sights lead up to thee. When we are charmed by beauty, may it be a preparation for the Origin of all that is lovely; when we pause to listen to sweet strains, may we know that one day we shall see the Chief Musician, and delight ourselves in the music of his blessing. Teach us through Jesus Christ, thy Son, that all these things round about us and above us are but so many dim symbols trying to be what they can never be. May we accept them as signs pointing towards the Great Light and the Perfect Being. We thank thee for all hints that lift themselves towards the opened heaven; we thank thee for every finger pointed upwards. We accept as from thyself every man in whose voice there is some unearthly tone. Deliver us from the custody of time and space; give us to feel that, being in Christ Jesus, his unsearchable riches are ours, every one, and that poverty of soul cannot be known by those who inherit the kingdom of heaven. Thou hast done so much for us; we did not know that the common dust could have been breathed into this immortality. We are thy miracles; we are thy proofs and epistles—may we read ourselves every line, and see thy writing in all the sacred message. Thou hast built a house for us which we call home—it is not little if our hearts be grateful; it is not too large if our love of God throw it into contempt. Thou hast made a business for us whereby bread comes

plentifully and honestly—there is so much of it that we are surprised by the quantity ; it is so sweet that we are pleased by the honesty that won it. Thou hast created for us a thousand centres of delight—the soil is full of wells which we never dug ; the night-time glitters with lights that want to say something ; and as for what we call the latter end, it is our mistake to call it by such a name, there are no ends in God ; there is no death in Christ ; all things are ours. We have come to praise thee, because in pain and in trouble thou hast healed us and comforted us, and out of sorrow thou hast brought joy. Again, by thy good hand upon us, we see the holy place. If thou hast shut us out of it for a time, truly the gates look wider than they ever looked, and there is a light in the house so pleasant, so hospitable ! we never saw the like before. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul hath a desire and a longing to enter into the house of the Lord. The accident in the family thou hast turned into a blessing ; thou dost save us from the greater accidents by the little ones. We leave ourselves quite in thine hands. We would not sigh even in token of resignation ; rather would we be quite breathless lest our very breathing should be a sin known to thyself alone. We put ourselves right in front of thee, not with the boldness of self-approval, but with the simple, loving trust of great sinners who have a great Saviour. Send us east or west—only point the direction. Give us the message, see that it is well wrought into our hearts, and then go with us and bring us back again. Lift us above all fear. What if the marketplace be murkier and noisier than ever before ? it is as a fool's wrath, and will cry itself to peace like a great wind. What if we have not quite so much in the right hand this year as we had last ? it is nothing to us ; we are fools to have reckoned the sum ; we ought to have lived in love. The Lord make us good warriors of his own—great soldiers, strong fighting men, always remembering that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. The Lord keep us in his own way. May we be ready for war whilst we are still praying for peace. The Lord work out the mystery of our life, until we so see it as to praise God, from whom all blessings flow, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Acts xxiii. 1-35.

1. And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.
2. And the high-priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.
3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?
4. And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high-priest ?
5. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest : for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

6. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee : of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees : and the multitude was divided.

8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit : but the Pharisees confess both.

9. And there arose a great cry : and the Scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man : but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

11. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

12. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14. And they came to the chief priests and elders and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him : and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain : for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

18. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me ?

20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldst bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

21. But do not thou yield unto them : for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him : and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

23. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen three-score and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night ;

24. And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

25. And he wrote a letter after this manner :

26. Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

27. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them : then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

28. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council :

29. Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

30. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

31. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

32. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle :

33. Who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

34. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia ;

35. I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

INCIDENTAL CHARACTERISTICS.

WE sometimes pay compliments when we are not aware that we are paying them. We are made to pay tributes to power in the very act of appearing to despise it. Truly this man Paul disturbs and upsets everything. I do not know that he ever appeared to be socially greater than when he was sent to Cæsarea with "two hundred soldiers," "and horsemen three-score and ten, and spearmen two hundred"—so small a man, so "blear-eyed" that he could hardly see the high-priest in the council, so poor, with a back lacerated, with limbs bent with weariness. Yet now he begins to trouble governors and captains and kings, and

to be made such a stir about. And they could not help it. When they laid their hands upon him he was not there ; when they sent for him at night he had gone the night before ; when they looked for him in the morning they found nothing in the prison but his footprints. This was a moth they could not crush. We have entered now into a new region of Apostolic history ; we shall sometimes be almost amused by certain aspects of it—such great courts and such a small prisoner. Yet they can do nothing with the man—some little mouse always bites the net and lets the lion loose. We have been accustomed to great preaching and great missionary tours, great theological arguments ; now we come into another kind of controversy. And yet there is just the same mystery about the man ; he is like his Master—the only quiet man in all the tumult. Had he been noisier, they could have done more with him at their own will and fancy ; but that ghostly serenity was very mocking and baffling. Paul had himself once been a member of the very council which he now addressed. What changes there are in life ! He who was once one of the seventy-two now stood before the council a prisoner ! He looks quite as well in the dock as he ever looked on the bench ; but the remembrance of his once having been on the bench gives him his first sentence—“ Men and brethren,” that sentence began. Think of the criminal addressing the judge as a brother ! Think of the criminal, as we know him nowadays, using any kind of familiar and endearing expression towards the incarnate Justice seated upon the bench ! There is a mystery even in these things. The quality of men comes out at unexpected places. Paul was never less than the chief of the Apostles ; in no company was there a greater man ; wherever he came he was the cynosure of all eyes.

How proud his beginning with a humble pride ! “ I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” He means to be great. Earnest speakers reveal themselves in their first sentence ; they do not dally, grope about, hesitate, but swiftly and precisely come to the key-note which is to rule their music, however sublime its variation, however daring its vocal enterprise.

But goodness always awakens wickedness. The man presiding over the council was the embodiment of every crime that could defile personal character and debase official dignity. Josephus

paints his portrait, and the portrait is one mass of darkness, and no later historian has ventured to add one touch of light to the infinite density. Hearing a man claim a good conscience, he was reminded of his own evil career ; and we often seek to make ourselves virtuous by punishing what we believe to be, or apparently conceive to be, the claim of any other man to a good standing and spotless reputation. "Ananias commanded them that stood by Paul to smite him on the mouth." That is the only thing the bad man can do. He has no other shot in his locker ; he can only strike, abuse, defame, and cause the innocent to suffer. It is the least power—it is not power ; it is the weakness of fury and the fury of weakness.

Now we see quite a new aspect of Paul. He has borne so much that we thought he would bear everything right through to the last ; but there was a priestism which Paul could not bear, so he exclaimed, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall"—a mass of clay chalked over ; that white robe is not a white character ; the linen is fine, but it clothes a ferocious nature. Nor was this mere anger. Paul has been blamed for this little ebullition by men who themselves become angry seven days a week. But I would be found amongst those who applaud the sublime indignation. It was inspired by moral emotion and conviction. The reason of this anger is given : "For sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" We are bound to defend eternal rectitude ; sometimes in defending it we may only seem to be overtaken by human infirmity. It is right to be angry ; it is a sin sometimes to appear to be satisfied when the heart is filled with a conviction that things are wrong. Always notice the reason of the anger, and you will find that reason to be not a merely personal one, as if personal pride had been made to suffer, but a moral one, and, therefore, a comprehensive one, and, therefore, the anger not of a man, but of the race of men. Paul speaks here not for himself only, but for every man, time through and the world over, who suffers wrongfully. The prophecy was fulfilled : the beast was slain ; he was dragged out not long afterward and killed by vengeful hands.

It is curious to notice, and most instructive, how religious some people suddenly become. "They that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high-priest?" Hypocrites, every one ! Ananias rose

and fell in their estimation according to circumstances, which Ananias could not control. He was high-priest when it suited them ; he was a common man when it suited their purpose to treat him so. They were conventionalists ; they simply accepted the spirit of office and of ceremonialism, and did not care to inquire how far it connected itself with personal holiness and expressed personal worth.

In what follows Paul has been severely condemned. Some commentators even think that now Paul has proved himself to be but a man ; great and good commentators have endeavoured to throw their robes over Paul, as if to screen him from the sight of those who would be only too anxious to discover a flaw in such fine porcelain. They need not have done so from my point of view ; Paul needs no defence of mine. Said he, " I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest." We may read : " I did not sufficiently reflect that he was the high-priest." Or we may read it, as I think better still, ironically : " The high-priest breaking the law ! The high-priest commanding something to be done which is contrary to the law ! This cannot be the high-priest ! I see a crowd of men dressed in white robes, and I hear a voice, but surely this cannot be, or it ought not to be, the voice of the high-priest. When high-priests break law, law must cease to be operative, or it will cease to be respected." Again Paul advances a moral reason—for that was the great battering-ram with which he delivered his most terrific blows. " For it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Mark the intellectual composure, the intellectual ability, and the courtliest gentlemanliness. Up to this point Paul has the best of it. They have made no impression upon him yet. They have struck him upon the mouth ; they have resented his supposedly untimely rebuke, but he comes out of this fray without the smell of fire having passed upon him. Surely some one must be standing at his right hand whom we cannot see. There are mystic as well as palpable companionships in life. We also are compassed about. Hereafter Paul may say, " But the Lord stood by me." We must wait.

In Paul's action in the course of this trial and the subsequent proceedings, two things are clear. First, that it is lawful to break up unholy truces. What is the case ? The Pharisees and the Sadducees have combined in a common cause, whereas the Phari-

sees and the Sadducees are themselves divided by the greatest possible differences. This we call an unholy compromise. Paul says, "I will break this up; I will divide this council and assembly; I will show that I am not the only person who has controversies with his contemporaries." "When Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he said, Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." This suggestion was effectual. The Pharisees and the Sadducees fell upon one another, and the Pharisees said, "We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." It was a master-stroke; it was well delivered. We should not forget it in modern conflicts and impending controversies. We have in this country what is known as an Established or National Church—remember that on the one hand. On the other hand, we have a great number of Christian communions known as Nonconformist Churches. They hold that religion is personal, and is between man and his Maker; that no man should be compelled to support the religion of any other man; that men should be left at perfect liberty to obey the inspiration of individual conscience and individual love, in matters purely and unchangeably spiritual and moral. The Nonconformists, therefore, would be willing to disestablish the National Church, relieve it from State patronage and control, and would follow it with warmest prayer for enlarged spiritual success. Am I going to accept the help of an infidel, an atheist, an agnostic, or a blasphemer, in carrying out this sacred purpose? No. I will not be a party to the unholy truce, because the men who would assist in this work would not only disestablish the Church, but disestablish Christianity; therefore I say, "I will not have any common object with you that has in it any religious conviction or responsibility; I decline your co-operation; we cannot pray together, and therefore we cannot work together. Not only would you tear down the Church in its political and imperial aspects, you would deface the altar, you would burn the Bible, you would take down and hew to pieces the sacred Cross." Men vitally divided ought not to have any nominally common ends. If questions are merely political, the whole controversy will be settled accordingly; but where questions are first religious and then political, I decline to accept the co-operation of any man in such

work with whom I cannot first pray. There is no Church, Established or Non-Established, holding the Deity of Christ and the infinite necessity and preciousness of the Atonement, to which I do not wish God-speed. There may be false relations, unhappy and undesirable arrangements as between some of those Churches and political facts, governments, and histories ; but I for one will have nothing to do with the help of any hand which would tear the crown from my Master's head, if he could reach it. There are those who can accept such aid, and I am not called upon to pronounce judgment upon them.

Secondly, that it is lawful to defeat unholy conspiracies. Forty men had bound themselves together neither to eat nor drink until they had slain Paul, and those forty men were eating and drinking all the time. Never believe in the oath of a bad man ; his taking it dispossesses it of all that is solemn. Bad men cannot take an oath ; it is the holy word. Have no confidences with bad men. If you have overheard their plots, go and publish them. You may not receive confessions of murder and say nothing about it. Confidence is a limited term. There is an eternal confidence that overrules all momentary compacts and promises. We owe something to the individual man ; we owe more to the entire race of men. There are confessions and confidences we may, and must, gladly hide away in the heart, but they have no relation to policies and courses which would unhinge society and throw down civilization. Put every possible obstacle in the way of bad men ; let them feel the hook in their jaw ; let them feel that they are fighting against an infinite pressure ; give them to know that the scorn of every noble man and every holy woman burns against them ; give them to feel that they have no right to be in decent society ; whenever they lift a hand may they feel a great weight upon it ; report their doings ; throw an intense focalized light upon the hell they are building. " My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Have no part or lot or memorial with them. Bring the ghostly element to bear upon bad men. Imagine the forty Jews baffled in their design and not knowing how they had been baffled ! Said they, " Who knew about this ? You have told !" " No ; I never told," one of their number suddenly accused might reply. " The oath has been broken by some traitor," and nine-and-thirty voices reply to the fortieth, " No."

“Then how is this?” There is the mysterious element in life, the anonymous force, the mischief that upsets our mischief. This is always God’s purpose. The bad man lights his candle to be ready about the first hours of the morning, and when he awakes the candle is blown out and turned upside down! Says he, “Who did this?” And the midnight has no answer; the clock ticks on as if nothing had occurred; the bad man looks round and sees nought but emptiness. “How did this happen?” That is God’s plan; we do not know how things happen. The great, heavy end of government is in God’s hand. But something always does happen. How is that? We cannot tell.

LXXXVI.

P R A Y E R .

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are thy guests to-day. Thou hast spread the table and sent forth thy messages of love and welcome, and we have answered them, and to-day we sit under thy roof, and thy banner over us is love. We would have no thought that is not becoming the house ; we would be lifted up in spirit that we may praise the Lord in a fit song and worthily magnify his holy name. Thou knowest our need, and thou hast answered it in the Gospel of thy Son. Thou hast provided abundantly for us. In thy welcome there is no reserve ; it is as broad as our necessity, as deep as our guilt ; it is more than we can express in our poor words—an infinite love. We bless thee that we have any desires towards thyself, for they do us good. Their very passage through the soul cleanses it ; they lift us up, they warm us with a new fire, they open our nature towards the best influences, they set the soul towards all the light of heaven. These desires are thy miracles ; these impulses are heaven-born. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. We might have turned wholly to the dust, and have sought under our feet the rest of beasts ; instead of this we lift up our heads and thrust our hands out into the sky, aiming at great things as men struggling upward with noble endeavour, if, haply, we may attain the height of heaven. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts. We would bless his name ; we would ascribe praise without break or flaw to the great Three-One. Send into our hearts the Holy Ghost—"Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire." Give us to feel the pentecostal glow ; let us know what is meant by an unction from the Holy One. Fill our hearts until they overflow. Let thy truth be precious to us beyond rubies, beyond all things accounted precious by men. May we seek for wisdom as for silver that is hidden, and for understanding as for gold that can only be had for much labour. Thus shall our life, though little, be great, and, though short, be long, and the grave shall but begin our higher being, the dark place shall be the starting-point of our bright and immortal career. The Lord send Christmastide into our hearts. May Christ be born in us the hope of glory ; may every heart be Bethlehem ; may every life know the shining of the star to be swiftly succeeded by the brighter shining of the sun. Then shall our lives know jubilee ; then shall our spirits break into gracious liberty ; then shall we feel no shame in the fellowship of the angels, being made pure as they are through the blood of the living, dying, rising Son of God. We bless thee for all family mercies. We thank thee that

the children are at home again, that the fireside is complete, that on the hearth there is no coldness by reason of absence, or break, or distress. Where there is such break we will not chide the Hand that made it ; if we cannot praise, we will at least be silent with religious awe ; where there is a great gap we will say, " The hand of the Lord did it, and it is well ;" where there is great joy we will say, " This is the light of heaven—a candle set here by the hand divine ;" where there is great darkness there shall be great resignation. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh, the Lord reigneth. Let us kiss the rod, and put out our hand inquiringly and prayerfully towards him who uses it. We send our prayers and blessings after those who have gone from us for awhile. We will not account this a break-up ; it is but the momentary separation that is made up for by redoubled love. Go with our friends to their homes here and there and yonder and far away, and make others glad as well as we, and throughout all the land may there be Christmas song, Christian psalm, utterance of praise and love, because he was born who cannot die, and in whose immortality we find our security of heaven. As for those who have no Christmas—to whom the year is one long winter—thou canst stand by them and speak to them in the night season, and in the prison thou canst cheer them with great visions, thou canst delight them with great satisfactions. They know not why they were born, nor can we tell them ; we are dumb at the sight of their pain, we feel our own weakness when we touch their distress. But we neither began nor can we end the system of things in which we live—the Lord reigneth. As we stand at the manger-cradle we also stand at the Cross, for they are truly one—the incarnation is the atonement ; the birth is the death ; the death is the birth—the Life is one. So, come to us as we need thee, and make the day long ; command the sun to stand still till we fight up to victory our great war with every enemy of the soul ; and at night, after a long, strenuous battle, may we sleep like good knights of God. Amen.

CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS: THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT.

Acts xxiii.

(Continued.)

WE have just looked at this incident from the purely human standpoint ; let us now regard it from the Divine side. So regarding it, we must be instantly struck by the dark fact that in the most saintly lives there are moments of apparent desertion by God. Throughout these exciting events, where is the living Lord ? The Apostle is brutally entreated ; he is smitten on the

mouth ; he is thrust into prison ; he is sent away as a criminal ; he is tossed to and fro like a thing that has no friend. How is this ? Is this the poor return for all the labour we have traced, for all the sorrow we have watched these many days ? An angel in the dark heavens just now would be a sight that would confirm our faith. Some bright dazzling vision, making the great sky tremble with light, would have a happy effect upon our little souls. We feel the need of something ; the reading is cold ; the line wants the curve of beauty ; the events need to be flushed with a new colour. Yet this is common history. We ourselves have been in exactly those spiritual circumstances. The trappings change—the incidents, the outer garments—but the inward fact abides as one of the unchangeable quantities in Christian consciousness and Christian education. God does stand afar off sometimes ; he stood afar off in the olden time, and the Psalmist asked him why he stood there, millions of miles away, so far off as almost to cease to be in existence for all practical purpose and effect. Why does he not always stand close to the heart that has never struck but in his praise ? Why does he turn his back upon the house in whose every room there is an altar built to him with most pious hands ? We are Christian students, and we cannot deny the desertion. We have no wish to alter facts. There are times when we have no God ; there are great empty hours in life in which the enemy might house himself with some comfort ; there are whole days in which we cannot pray. There may be a year at a time almost when the Christian minister is no minister at all—only a dumb suppliant, only a man groping in darkness without hope of finding anything. If he be steadfast in those gloomy hours, he may come out suddenly quite renewed in strength, quite invincible in will and immortal in hope. What is this desertion ? It may only be the sleep of the soul. Physiologists tell us the heart sleeps at every extreme of its oscillation. This desertion may only be the winter time in which God is giving the life deep rest, sweet sleep, and a time of recuital and renewal. Sleep is not death—the conscious absence of God is not atheism. We must learn to bear these vacancies ; we cannot always be upon the mountain-top. It is part of our larger education that we should submit to these great yawning gaps, in which we have no fellowship with God that can be expressed in terms of joy. We are not

Christians because we are in high moods, or in great raptures of soul, in ecstasies that outrun all speech and mock all articulate and coherent utterance. We may be silent Christians, dazed, bewildered, afflicted, deserted Christians. I am speaking now of broad effects ; presently the relieving light will come—meanwhile, the great challenge is to memory, and the great appeal is to the hope that is not extinguished, but only moderated in its brightness. Do not hurry over the empty hours as if they were full—you lose a great deal by indecent haste. Why not take the hours that are in the hand and look at them and say, “ These are empty of God as I usually understand that term ; they are the trial of my life ; they are the cold places in the course through which I pass ; they may be open doors through which the devil may approach my soul ” ? We should be men enough in Christ Jesus to pass our gloomiest hours with a faith which, though it cannot sing, can even yet mutter some inarticulate prayer. Let us own that on the face of this chapter the enemy seems to have the advantage.

We are entitled to say, in the next place, that the desertion is apparent, not real ; or temporary, not final. There is one verse, even in this dark chapter, that shines over all the rest like a lamp. That verse is the 11th : “ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul.” There are nights and nights. To-morrow night is coming ; this night is not the final darkness. Here begins what might be carried out into the strongest defence of some of the most precious truths in the theology of Christianity. This verse brings us face to face with the fact that Christian consciousness is the beginning of Christian argument. We do not understand the full range of the term consciousness as it is used in Christian speech. Consciousness is an individual term—that is to say, it describes personal, inward experience and knowledge. That is not a matter to be debated outside any other man, as if it were a question of terms and figures and symbols ascertainable and expressible to the eye of the body. You cannot complete any argument either for Christianity or against it if you ignore individual consciousness. Before you can destroy Paul's argument, you have to destroy Paul's character. That is the unanswerable defence of spiritual Christianity. We have not spent all these months in tracing the history of Paul

without being able now to see that he is a man of great mental capacity, of distinct logical faculty, of almost unexampled practical common-sense ; a great demonstrator ; a great leader, a great soldier, and, as such, standing on the basis of that indisputable character, he says, "The Lord stood by me." Consider the character of the witness. You are not entitled to call such a man either false or mistaken without being able to produce evidence which will leave no doubt as to the correctness of your knowledge. The Christian argument is not a matter that can be settled upon paper. The Christian consciousness, which often has no words fit for its adequate expression, is the sanctuary in which these solemn questions, regarding the Christian evidences, must be determined. Elisha had the inner vision which saw the nearer army. Jesus Christ combined both the statements upon which we are now dwelling in one sublime utterance—said he, "I am alone, yet not alone : for the Father is with me." Of what avail is our contradiction of that statement? We must destroy the character before we can destroy the testimony. This is a good answer to all attacks upon the altar of prayer. You cannot say upon paper, or as mere logicians and question-answerers, whether prayer is answered or not ; you must ask the suppliant, and he is the only witness who can be heard upon the question : "Has your prayer been answered?" When the suppliant can say "Yes," that settles the question. The appeal is not—believe me—to your little scholarship, or to your little criticism ; you are not addressed at all upon this subject ; you are in the outer circle of things ; you are not in the court at all ; you have no *locus standi*. Here the man—the well-known man, the man with the solid character, and the sensible, penetrating mind—says, "My prayers have been answered." You could flippantly deny it ; but you could as flippantly deny ten thousand assertions made by honest men. There is no argument in denial ; you never can set a denial against the testimony of a Christian known to be thoroughly sound and good. We have been now so long with Paul that we have come to know somewhat about him. He has never been a weak man ; he may have been, from the worldly point of view, self-careless, reckless, daring beyond what we should call the point of prudence : but a weak man—never. There has been no quiver in the emphasis of his voice ; there has been no

uncertainty in the tone of his declarations ; he, therefore, steps into the witness-box and says, "The Lord stood by me." What is our answer? We are not asked for an answer ; we are not invited to be critically clever in relation to that man's testimony. Perhaps we have neglected this department of the Christian evidences—namely : the department of Christian consciousness, inward spiritual conviction, communion and trust. We have listened to the tongue of the body, uttering with uncertain emphasis uncertain words ; we have not listened to the tongue of the soul, speaking firmly, clearly, and with the penetration of personal conviction.

Here also we find, not only illustrations of the supreme argument for prayer, but illustrations also of the supreme argument for immortality. That is not a question to be determined by words and sentences, by logical fencing and by historical research ; we must go by the instinctive nature as well as by the logical faculty. We cannot help to pray ; we are bound to pray. As for our immortality, we know it ; it is graven upon the very substratum of our life. We were immortal before we were mortal, and we are only mortal as a part of our immortality. These are contradictions in mere words, in narrow letters, but they admit of the completest reconciliation in that sacred consciousness which is the strongest defence of every Christian position.

We cannot look at this incident without seeing, in the next place, that the enemy is made to serve the cause he would destroy : "Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome"—and the enemy shall pay the expenses. The enemy is always forced into servitude ; he thinks he is overturning the kingdom at the very moment he is unwittingly strengthening it in all its time-relations. God maketh the wrath of man to praise him. God has many servants, as well as those who were openly anointed on the plain, or secretly ordained in the high places of the hills. God has black servants ; God has messengers, errand-bearers, menial attendants of every name and kind and size. A great host is God's ; verily, he is the Lord of hosts. Everything is working for Christ, if we could only see it so ; all secular progress is simply making a wider road for the chariot of Immanuel. The Christian cause had great difficulties at first—there is a shorter way from Jerusalem

to Rome now than there was in the days of Paul. Paul did not go from Jerusalem to Cæsarea at his own charges. The invention of steam was an incident in the development of Christian progress. Christians ought to keep their eyes open. The moment there is a new way of travelling invented, the first traveller should be a missionary. The instant you can find a shorter way of communicating with the distant parts of the earth, you should send a Christian message through the new medium. That is done ceremonially on some great occasions—for example : when the cable is laid from Great Britain to any great country, the monarch of the one sends the first message to the monarch of the other, wishing, “ God speed and God bless you, even you and your land.” That is symbolical of what ought to take place. The ships are Christ’s, and you have let other people use them first for merchandise, and the missionary has been stowed away somewhere as a thing not wholly welcome. “ The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” You can now travel what once took fourteen days in seven ; what use is the Church making of that progress now ? The Church has taken to merchandise, to ship-loading, to money-trafficking. There lies under the ocean a mysterious thread ; what use is the Church making of that black thing ? None. That is for politics, for stocks and shares—that thing so near being not a thing, but a thought—that separating line between the material and the spiritual. The Church is making no use of it ; the Church is a dead carcase. I would have the Church buy up all the bad houses in London, and in the world, and make good places of them ; I would have the Church advertise Gospel services in every newspaper in the kingdom ; I would have the Church—alive ! There is no deader thing unburied, in many respects and in many places, than the professing Church of Christ. It pursues its way, will stand still for anything, hide its head on any pretence, mumble its little hymn, hasten through its perfunctory prayer, and go home to forget it all. The Church is not the heroic force of this day, saying, “ I must see Rome also.” When the Church goes to see Rome, the Church goes in a tweed suit, in holiday attire, and chokes out of itself every trace and sign of its being a Church ; the Church travels *incog*. Would God we were alive ! We should buy up all the bad places, fill up all the rat-holes ; we should be

alive, we should be mad ! Yet some ministers have told me that they really dare hardly propose to publish even a small hand-bill announcing some special service. Who fails in that case ? Not the man who wanted to publish the bill, but the men who prevented its publication. Let us know them, name them, blame them, point them out, and say, " These are the men that hinder the Christian cause." We have fallen into lackadaisical tempers and moods ; we are not abreast of the age. If a man should now get a drum or trumpet, or tambourine, or anything with which to beat the devil on his own ground, he is called by unfriendly names. What is our calling in Christ ? Is it to fall asleep, or to be the first force in society ? If you make your Christianity a respectability, you are crucifying the very Lord you profess to adore. Let me call younger men to heroic temper and force and holy courage in this matter. Never mind the charge of madness ; in his own day they said that Jesus had a devil, and that he was mad ; and later on they said that Paul was beside himself. If we have fallen upon the cold and monotonous days, in which our religion is but a performance, and our worship but a ceremony an hour long, we are not advancing, we are retrograding ; we are not awake, we are asleep. Let me say again and again—for herein would I find the very refrain of my ministry were I closing it to-day—if Christianity is not a passion supreme in the soul, it is the greatest mistake ever perpetrated by intellectual men. All the roads are being made for Christ. See the patent spade, and patent mattock, and patent roller, and patent steam engine—they say these things are being used for certain definite purposes ; they know not what they say. Every turnpike is being made for Christ ; every horse is being saddled for Christ ; every mighty throb of steam is preparing to carry Gospel news to far-away places. Would God we had the sense of the children of this world !

LXXXVII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, because of thy good hand upon us we find ourselves in the house of prayer, and in the place of Christian home. Thou hast brought our wandering feet into the secure place; we are no longer out upon the cold rocks seeking rest and finding none: we are in our Father's house, bright with his mercy, warm with his love, strong with his almightiness. So will we sing a new song unto thee, and a loud psalm, and will not spare our voices in the cry which expresses the praise of our hearts. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Thou hast planted flowers in places in which we thought no beauty could grow; thou hast supplied us with water in the land of thirst; thou hast made our bed in our affliction; thou hast turned our loss into gain; and when we have said, in want of faith which was well-nigh despair, "All these things are against me," thou hast turned them round and made them friends of ourselves, so that the things which had happened unto us of a perverse and trying kind have turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel in our hearts. The year which we hailed with joy is now passing silently and gloomily away. It lingers like a friend loath to go—still its last few hours are round about us waiting for some good inscription, for some holy vow, for some new confession, for some bolder prayer. Is there not yet time for victory? Shall the battle of the year close in our defeat? or shall we not, by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, stand up at the last and be more than conquerors through him who loved us? Wilt thou work this miracle in our life? Wilt thou, ere the hours quite go, show us the way of salvation and lead us into the temple of thy peace? That we can pray is truly not the least of thy miracles. That we have any desire rising upwards to the light of heaven is truly the gift and the doing of God. So will we hope in thee evermore. Our dying breath may be a prayer; our last look may be towards the places of the stars, and far away beyond their dim shining into the infinite light. This is our hope in Christ; this is the victory of faith. Lord, give us, through the Cross, the mystery and the jewel of thine own peace. Great peace have they that love thy law: they have peace that passeth understanding. Lord, grant us thy peace. May the Son of peace dwell in us; may we know the meaning of reconciliation through the blood of the Cross, and so know it as to be unable to explain it in words which would but mock the mystery. Help us to lean upon thee, to cling to thee, to rest in thee, to have no will of our own, but to wish to be what thou wouldst have us

be, amid all the temptings of time and all the strain and trial of changing life. Thou hast been with us in the wilderness and on the sea and in the garden of flowers and on the hills of frankincense. Thou wilt not disappoint us now ; thou wilt never leave us or forsake us, for thou lovest us as we cannot love thee. The love is all on thy side ; therefore are we safe. The love is not the flicker of our affection, but the eternal sacrifice of thine own. We love thee because thou didst first love us—wondrous love ! the love unto death, having in it the mystery of blood, the gift of the heart. We cannot follow it : it is like thyself. And now let the mystery of thy grace appear unto us more clearly than ever. In its inspiration we shall encounter the year that is just coming. No terror shall that year bring with it if our hearts are fortified with thy grace ; it shall be our year—the year of jubilee and victory upon victory ; of such exaltation of the soul in Christ as shall turn the old earth into new heavens. The Lord withhold not from us the blessing without which the year is a great void. Comfort thy people with heavenly solaces ; and when the banner dips in the mire and is bedraggled there, and they are ashamed of it because they have let it fall, give them lifting up of heart and renewal of courage, and may they shake out the banner in the wind and dry it in the sun of thy grace. The Lord rebuild our house for us every year ; the Lord light the fire in the house every morning ; the Lord see to it that we have bread enough ; the Lord clothe us with garments sufficient for us ; the Lord be our Servant because he is our Sovereign, and the Lord be unto us all we need because he is the Infinite. We gather at the Cross ; we touch the holy tree ; we look, but speak not, for our hearts are too full for speech. We know the meaning of thy languid eye, thou dying One ; we know the meaning of the flowing blood, thou Priest, thou Victim. We will not speak—we will look and touch and wait. Amen.

Acts xxiv. 1-9.

1. And after five days Ananias the high-priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

2. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

3. We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words.

5. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes :

6. Who also hath gone about to profane the temple : whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

7. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

8. Commanding his accusers to come unto thee : by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

9. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

PAUL MISUNDERSTOOD.

WE seem to know something about the Apostle Paul ourselves, having spent many weeks, as it were, in his living society. We have learned to love him ; we have felt ourselves in the presence of a strong and gracious nature. To-day we may hear what another man has to say about him. Once before we were struck almost to the point of amusement when Paul was mistaken for " that Egyptian, which before these days made an uproar, and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers." To-day a hired orator describes Paul—the very Paul with whom we have companied all this time—as " a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." Does this tally with what you know about him ? As we have read the exciting story from page to page, has it ever occurred to you to say, respecting the living hero, " pestilent fellow " ? When he preached upon Mars' Hill, when he comforted the sick and the desolate, when he prayed his great prayers, when he charged the elders of the Church at Ephesus, did it ever occur to you to characterise him as " a mover of sedition " ? Here is a man who was paid to abuse Paul. There is no cause too bad not to hire an advocate to represent it. Abuse is the easiest of all human tasks. It falls in, too, with a natural rhythm, with the disposition and tendency of some natures. They would not speak their mother tongue if they did not speak vituperatively : they would stammer like men unused to the language if they began to approve and to praise and to characterise any human service in grateful terms. This Tertullus was the genius of abuse ; the worse the cause the glibber his tongue. He lives to-day, and takes the same silver for his flippant eloquence.

How possible it is utterly to misconceive a great character !

Paul was utterly misconceived even by some persons who were not viciously dishonest. There is a key to every character, and if you do not get the key of the character, you never can understand the character itself. We must not condemn all men as hypocrites whom we cannot comprehend. Let us own that very much of what they do looks suspicious, self-seeking, ambitious, ignoble. It may not be so. The difficulty of the man of one idea is to understand any other man who has two : the man of one idea has a short and chopping way of speaking about other people, not knowing that, when he pronounces them dishonest, he is proclaiming himself a most virtuous person. Let us understand that there are some men in history, alike in the Church and in the State, whom we are unable to comprehend ; but let us not, therefore, imagine that they are bad men. Illustrious names, which cannot be mentioned in church without being misunderstood, will at once occur to every man. Some of us are so easy to understand, simply because there is so little to be comprehended. Then it is so easy to wash our hands in innocency by condemning the ambiguousness or ambitiousness of other people. Paul could not be understood by any man who for one single moment ever considered his own happiness ; that consideration would disentitle the critic to a place on the judgment-seat. If any man—let me say it again, until we become familiar with the distressing truth—can for one single instant consider his own advantage, good, place, or security, he cannot read the life of the Apostle Paul with the smallest comprehension of its meaning. Cowardice cannot understand heroism ; selfishness cannot comprehend self-sacrifice ; self-idolatry cannot understand the Cross. We should try to find the key of every character—in other words, the starting-point, or the basis-principle, and, having secured that, all the rest will be easy of interpretation. Start with the idea that Christ's kingdom was of this world, and the New Testament is a maze of contradiction, a labyrinth of perplexity. No character was so much misunderstood as Jesus Christ's : he knew it, he said it ; he made that fact into a source of comfort to all who should follow him in its representation ; said he, " If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ! " When blasphemy culminates in some daring act, all the actions which lie under that deed become quite easy tricks.

Blasphemy culminated in calling the master of the house "Beelzebub"—after that all other abuse was an easy performance, a small and pitiable miracle. Conscience itself may start from a wrong point in the estimation of character, and "if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" To have a conscience that does not rest on reason, to have a court in which there is no daylight—how immediate and tremendous the moral consequences! Even conscience may be twisted, perverted, poisoned. When that is the case it is impossible to understand childhood, simplicity, purity, unselfishness, and sacrifice.

Here, too, is the possibility of excluding from the mind every thought characterised by breadth and charity. It does not occur to the paid pleader to say, "This man is insane; this man is afflicted with the disease of romance; this prisoner has a craze about a theory too lofty or too immaterial for the present state of things." Sometimes a charitable spirit will take some such view. No such estimate is formed by Tertullus respecting Paul. Paul is to the orator "a pestilent fellow" and "a mover of sedition" and "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," for he knew that he was talking to a man who could only understand coarse epithets, for he himself, though a judge in those times, was the basest of his tribe. There was no meaner soul in all the Roman service than Felix. He, with his brother Pallas, had been a slave; by a cunning equal to Iscariot's own, he had worked himself up to a rulership, to high influence in the court, and his one object, as we shall find presently, was to be paid for his acquittals. Had not Paul dropped a word about some collection, or offering, which he had been making for the poor saints? Had the chink of money been heard at all? If so, the explanation is at hand which will characterise the whole policy of Felix. Meanwhile, we know nothing about that; but we do know, from history, that Felix was the most venal and detestable of his kind. To have spoken to Felix, therefore, about romance, extravagance, mental hallucination, would have been to throw straw to a tiger. Tertullus had head enough to know that only such words as "pest," "insurrectionist," and "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" could touch the base mind of the judge.

Yet, without viciousness, there may be great narrowness of mind, which excludes all great ideas and sublime possibilities.

You will contract that narrowness if you do not sometimes come out of your little village into great London. You will doze so long over your own parochial placidity and security, until you forget that there is a solar system. Meet men who will contradict you ; speak in companies that dare oppose you. Never assume finality of judgment. The Bible itself is a book of beginnings without endings. We may so live in a little, narrow, murky sphere as to mistake the very truth which it is our wish to serve. That is an instance of the light within being darkness. I know not of any more distressing spectacle than for a man to be using great words with little meanings. There is nothing so pitiful, so heart-breaking, to the apostolic mind, the heroic soul, as to hear infinite words without infinite meanings. So the words " God," " Christ," " Cross," " forgiveness," " immortality," " heaven"—we have all heard these immeasurable terms employed with measurable meanings. I venture this line of remark to show that I am not wishful to make every man into a Tertullus who opposes apostolic life and thought. It is possible honestly to oppose even the Apostle Paul, but the honesty itself is an expression of mental contractedness. What is perfectly right to the eye within given points may be astronomically wrong when the whole occasion is taken in. You would not find fault with a child who said, " The earth is stable, immovable." Within given points the child is talking sense ; yet the earth never stands still ; if she paused one moment, she would drop out of her sphere and be lost. So men may be parochially right and imperially wrong ; men may be perfectly orthodox within the limits of a creed and unpardonably heterodox within the compass of a faith.

How wonderful it is that even Tertullus is obliged to compliment the man whom he was paid to abuse ! Let us hear what Paul was on the showing of Tertullus. First, he was " a pestilent fellow." We have seen there was nothing negative about Paul, and Tertullus confirms that view. Paul was not a quiet character ; wherever he was he was astir ; the spirit of seven men was in him. His was an active faith ; it was not like the faith of some of us—a quietly rotting thing, sending up—or rather allowing to escape from it—odours of an unhealthy and poisonous kind. Paul was always alive. If he slept, we know nothing about it : we have no diary of his sleep ; the pages are alive with his activity.

If he was a bad man, there was nothing like him in the whole market-place of badness.

According to Tertullus, Paul was also "a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world"—a sentence intended to touch the ear of the Roman judge. As to being "a pestilent fellow," the phrase was vague, but now Felix might well listen with double attention, when the man before him was accused of being an insurrectionist, stirring up the Jews against the Roman rule. We have found that Paul was a moving man. Tertullus again confirms our impression. That he was "a mover of sedition" in the sense implied by Tertullus when using the word we have not found, but that he was the prince of revolutionists we do know. Every Christian is a revolutionist. Christianity does not plaster walls that are falling; it pulls them down; it tears up the foundations, uproots them; and, after this disestablishment, it begins to build up, and it builds for eternity.

There was a third qualification which Tertullus could not omit: Paul was "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." So the prisoner is not made into a little man even by the paid accuser. We felt that he never could be held in contempt. There is no contempt in the impeachment of Tertullus; the man is a great man—"pestilent," "seditious," "a ringleader" of whatever sect he enters. Put him where you will, he becomes the principal man in that company ere the sun go down. A rich banker said, when some one asked him questions regarding the wondrous fortune which he had amassed, "I cannot help it; if I were to-night stripped and turned into the streets of Copenhagen, I would be as rich in ten years as I am now—I cannot help it." Paul could not help being the first man of every company. He was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles; without asserting a claim, he entered into a sovereignty. So even Tertullus is obliged to eulogise the man he was hired to calumniate.

What is the inevitable issue of all narrow-mindedness? That issue is stated in the text—that issue, indeed, is falsehood. The proof you find in the sixth verse: "who also hath gone about to profane the temple." That was a lie; but that is the inevitable outcome of narrow-mindedness. The narrow-minded man must either end his days in falsehood or in insanity. If you have a narrow mind, you may be kept tolerably right so long as you are

kept in activity—your fussiness will save you—but if anything should occur to lay you on one side, you will become melancholy and insane. Entertain liberal ideas ; live under the whole sky ; go out in rainy weather as well as in sunshine and say, “ All this is under the same blue, kind, warm heaven.” Do not fix yourselves in relation to some particular point as if that were the universe. The garden is all God’s, and you may eat of every tree that is in it, and the proof of that liberality is in the fact that there is one tree you may not touch. That is the security of liberty ; that is the centre that binds all the points of the circumference into one solid and radiant cohesion.

Imagine Tertullus being excited regarding the purity of the temple ! Look at him as he refers with tears in his musical voice to the possibility of the temple being profaned ! How suddenly some men become pious ! How wonderfully they are excited about the temple under some circumstances ! What a genius is hypocrisy ! What a splendid gift of concealment it possesses ! You cannot misrepresent the people in the temple and yet be concerned honestly for the temple itself ; if you can tell what is not true about any brother who is in the house along with you, you cannot feel honestly about the house itself. The truth is one ; we cannot be true in one point out of ten ; herein is the philosophy of that marvellous saying, “ He that offends in one point offends in all,” because truth is an infinite solid : it cannot be disintegrated into particles, in some of which we claim a right of proprietorship.

The incident would hardly be worth dwelling upon were it confined to its own four corners, but it is a typical instance repeated continually in our day. Whenever the enemy represents the Christian cause he cannot get away from the lines of this dazzling impeachment. This is the model speech—the accidents vary, the fervour of the speaker goes up or down according to individual temperament ; but the speech is the same. Should there arise a burning evangelist in our days, accounting all things loss that he may win Christ, having one object, and that to bless men,—Tertullus is instantly developed by his presence. The good develops the bad : the explanation of the devil is in God. Let a George Fox arise—the founder of the sect of the Quakers or Friends—and how will he be characterised, except as “ a pestilent fellow,” “ a

mover of sedition," and "a ringleader of a sect"? There are no other words; this is the brief vocabulary. The devil is as poverty-stricken in language as he was in original invention; he has only one lie to tell, and what genius he has is to be found in the art with which he varies the telling of it. Let a John Wesley arise, or a George Whitefield, a John Bunyan or a John Nelson; read the early annals of English Christianity and evangelism; read the history of the early Methodist preachers, and you will find that every age that has brought a Paul has brought along with him a Tertullus. Thank God! nothing but epithets can be hurled against Christianity and its teachers; epithets are bruised by the very violence which throws them—hard words enough, biting sarcasms enough, great swelling words of impeachment enough; but epithets only. Christianity stands up to-day queenly, royal, pure, stainless—every stone thrown at her lying at her feet: herself untouched, unharmed; still putting out her arms, welcoming men to redemption, forgiveness, and heaven.

LXXXVIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would hide ourselves in thy love. Thy love is an infinite pavilion in which there is defence for every trustful soul. We say this in the triumph given unto us by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We need no other refuge ; we are at rest in thy love. Receive us, every one, and give every heart to feel the joy of Divine and infinite security. We love thy name. We look up unto the hills whence cometh our help, and, behold, they are higher than our imagining, stronger than all we can think—the hills of God, the mountains of light, the everlasting fortresses which give protection to the souls loving the Saviour and living in him. Come to us this new year and make it the brightest of all our time. Thou hast yet more wondrous things to do in us and by us and for us. Thy miracles are not ended ; thy revelations are not spent ; thou still hast the light that can enlarge our outlook and make us glad with higher joy. We will not believe that the fountain of thy grace can be dried up ; we will look for the living water, and looking, we shall surely find it—there is a look of the heart which thou canst not deny. We, therefore, come in quest of the living stream, the holy river—the blessed gift of God to the thirst of the immortal soul. We come in the name that is above every name, and, therefore, we shall not be sent empty away. We have victory assured in the name which we breathe. The name of Jesus cannot fail if we pronounce it with our faith and love ; it is an answer to our prayer, a fulfilment of our desire, an inspiration of our truest hope. Show us that the name of Jesus Christ is full of riches, full of grace, full of meaning. May we dwell upon it ; may we appeal to it continually that it may answer us with great replies and satisfy us with infinite satisfactions. We would be led farther into the heavenly fields than yet we have travelled ; we would see brighter visions than yet we have gazed upon ; we would hear the innermost voice and music of thy truth that steals upon the listening soul and gives delight in secret, causing the life to be filled with new courage that it may fight God's battles in the open day. Wherein we have done evil, let the Lord be pitiful unto us, and astonish us by renewals of grace ; may the hill of our sin be overshadowed by the infinite mountains of God's grace. Where sin abounds, may grace much more abound, so as to cast into forgetfulness the mistakes, the infirmities, the errors, and the crimes of our life. This is our one hope : that Christ is stronger than our enemy, Christ is richer in resources than the foe plighted to be against us evermore. We will trust in Christ, we

will rest in Christ, we will hide ourselves behind Christ ; we have no other hope ; we ask no other defence. Thou knowest our desires, our necessities ; thou knowest our innermost thought and wish. Thou wilt give us answers according to thy reading of our hearts, rather than to our utterance of desire. Thou wilt say, "No," where it is good for us that our prayer should be rejected. Thou wilt correctly read all the circumstances which make up our life, and to them, in all their wondrous combination and inexpressible meaning, thou wilt give the answer of thy love. Hold thou us up, and we shall be safe. Wherein we have done wrong, pity us ; wherein we have done aright, the praise be thine, for we did it against ourselves and against an infinite pressure. This is thy miracle, and we will praise it as the wonder of heaven. Wherein thou hast said in thy counsel, "This year thou shalt die," make the way easy, make the downward slope a gentle one, and send such mitigations of fear as shall turn apprehension into triumph. Wherein thou hast called any of us to new trial or suffering or endurance, may we bear it heroically as men sustained by grace Divine, and encouraged by exceeding great and precious promises. Let thy blessing go forth to our houses, to our sick-chamber, to all the little ones, whose prayers are best because they are wordless, and are but upward looks with meaning in them thou alone canst understand. Go with those who have gone far away, who have joined themselves unto citizens in countries where there is no cross, no Christ, no knowledge of God. Bring back the wanderer whilst we hold the door open to receive him. The Lord make us glad this year because lost children are born again unto us, and wanderers are come home. Upon the whole Church, redeemed with blood, let the mercy and the grace and the peace of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost rest in multiplied abundance. Bring all believing hearts nearer to God. Establish in love and confidence and union all who name the name of Jesus Christ. And thus, as the years come and go—yea, go in their coming—may we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and find, at last, that we have been all the while undergoing preparation, not for death, but for higher life, for wider service, for profounder worship. Amen.

Acts xxiv. 10-25.

10. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou has been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :

11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city :

13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call

heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets :

15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult,

19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

20. Or else let these same here say if they have found any evil-doing in me while I stood before the council,

21. Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.

22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

PAUL'S INSPIRED METHOD.

THIS whole chapter may enable us to see some new and illustrative views of the spirit and character of the Apostle Paul. We begin to see somewhat of the gigantic stature of his mind ; but the loftiness of the mountain must not lead us to overlook the fine mosses and delicate flowers with which its base is so exquisitely enamelled. It is difficult for many people to see more than one feature in a character ; they become prejudiced in favour of one view of the mind, and that prejudice excludes features quite as great as any which have been perceived. The character of Paul, for example, is as fine in texture as it is vast in bulk. When men speak of Jeremiah, they think of him as the weeping

prophet, forgetting that in the prophecies of Jeremiah are some of the finest poems ever dreamed by human imagination. But you will never persuade the world that Jeremiah did anything but cry. So with the Apostle Paul : a prejudice has been formed respecting him as a reasoner, a theologian, a man mighty in debate. The truth is, no man in all the New Testament but One had a heart so great, so tender, so womanly ; but you will never persuade the Church that Paul was anything but a theological fighter. This is distressing : it hinders the progress of Christian education. It represents our own nature, nevertheless, and shows us to ourselves, revealing the impossibility of our taking in more than one view of any many-sided character. Look at the incident before us as contributing somewhat to the elucidation of the finer and more fibrous lines that made up the life, the soul, the inspiration, and the service of the great Apostle.

Look at the contrast between Paul's introduction and the preface of Tertullus. Christianity makes gentlemen ; Christianity is the religion of delicateness, refinement, subtlety of spiritual excellence. It put a fire into Paul's weak eyes that nothing else could have put there. Christianity changes the visage, the voice, the touch ; it makes new creatures. Wherein we are vulgar, common, ill-looking, we are not Christians ; we do but show the space which Christianity has yet to cover and to conquer, and, blessed be God, it will do so. It will change our vile body and make it like unto the typical Body, full of glory ; on the road it performs intermediate miracles and sets up symbolic signs, full of earnest and pledge. Tertullus began cringingly, fulsomely, falsely. He told Felix things which Felix knew were not true, but they were men standing on the same level, and they were not critical when the vanity of the one was excited and the falsehood of the other was prepared to minister to it.

The governor having haughtily inclined his head towards the prisoner in sign that he might speak now—a haughty Roman nod—Paul said, “ Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.” Felix had not been judge a great many years, but he had been judge more than about twice the usual time, and Paul recognised that fact, forasmuch as it was the only compli-

ment he was able to pay the corrupt governor. It was a circumstance over which Felix had next to no control. A man cannot help being the senior member of a company. Beautiful the genius, subtle and not false the flattery, which recognises his seniority as if it were an excellence ! Christianity is courteous—never rough ; recognising whatever can be recognised in the way of excellence, or continuance of service, but never stooping to drag its own crown in the mire.

In this introduction you have one of the lines in Paul's character. Look at the temper which Paul displayed under what we may call this hurricane of abuse. He has just been called " a pestilent fellow," " a mover of sedition," and " a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," a profaner of the temple, and then he is asked to speak for himself. There is no excitement in his reply, there is no resentment ; he contents himself with denial and with challenging proof. Some charges you can only deny. There is nothing so easy as to bring a charge against a man, and all that is left to him, in proportion to his innocence, is the poor opportunity of saying, " This is not true." But the world is slow to learn that lesson. The world has read the Bible, and has been struck with the instances in which innocent men have been basely charged with infamous crimes, and, whilst the world is quite willing to believe that four thousand years ago innocent men may have been charged falsely, the world will not believe that about its own contemporaries. It is a wicked world ! What has Paul to say in reply to these accusatory statements ? Nothing, except to say they are not true, any one of them, and, therefore, the men who speak them are liars. That is a poor defence ; yet that is the only defence possible. Any man is placed at an infinite disadvantage who has to answer charges in which there is no truth. Were there the slightest particle of truth, he could out of that particle make a great defence ; but when the charges of pestilence, sedition, ringleadership, profanity, are only pure and simple lies from end to end, part of his defence is in his quietness, no small part of his defence is in the absence of vindictiveness. Fury would have created suspicion, and resentment would have been an argument on the other side ; but the quietness of the consciousness of innocence and utter absence of anything like

undignified feeling—these must be taken as contributing to the establishment of an irrefragable proof that an innocent man was in the presence of Felix.

Look at the manner in which the personal defence is made to create room for the doctrinal exposition. Paul does not spend much time upon himself: he hastens away to speak of larger things and larger interests. We have seen this to be the habit of Paul; he will not tarry over little things; he is in haste to accomplish a sublime purpose and issue. This is his spirit now. The larger consideration always ruled Paul; in his view, the whole world was only made for the one purpose of receiving the kingdom of Christ. Why do we not take our rule from his magnanimous method? Do not defend yourself, but preach and live, expound and exemplify the truth. There is a view in which it is a very small thing as to what any man is or does; when the man is innocent, there is nothing more trifling than that he should begin to defend himself. Rest in your innocence. Many stones may be thrown at you, but every one of them will miss the mark; the cruel part of it all is that some persons imagine that if stones are thrown at you, you deserve to be stoned. Do not let that trouble you; such men are not to be convinced; they are amongst the people who are elected by a sovereignty we cannot control to be the victims of their own prejudices. They have only one idea in their heads, and it is impossible to get another into them; you may silence them, but never convince them. Do not waste your time over them, but exemplify the Gospel, expound the larger truth, live in the larger element, and in due time all will be brought to a peaceful and happy issue. Paul never failed to proceed from the little personal to the infinite impersonal. A moment's wave of the hand that perhaps he might remove a particle of the mud, and away he went—broad-souled, mind on fire—to tell what he knew about the kingdom of his blessed Lord and Master. To each of us the Spirit says, "Go thou and do likewise."

Observe, in the fourth place, how Paul keeps hold of his audience, by preaching Christianity without so much as naming Christ. This is the mystery which modern times cannot handle. Read Paul's defence and tell me where Christianity can be found in it in any doctrinal and positive form. Is there not genius here? I;

there not inspiration in knowing where to stop, how to draw your lines, how to adapt resources to necessities? Paul might have been the orator on the other side; Paul might have been simply a Roman addressing a Roman, so far as the name, the priesthood, and the deity of Jesus Christ are concerned. As we now understand—or misunderstand—the matter, there is not one evangelical sentence in the whole speech. That would not suit a modern audience, because a modern audience is foolish. Inspiration guides a man quite as much in teaching him what not to say as in teaching him what to say; inspiration has to do with method as well as with matter. I know not whether there can be found any instance of Divine inspiration more patent and satisfactory than the one which we find in this speech of Paul. Is he then not preaching Christ? He is preaching him all the time. He is creating a wonder; he is developing a certain state of mind; he says mentally, "This is not the whole affair. I shall have more chances; it is enough now to touch curiosity, to excite surprise, to create interest in me and in my message; by-and-by I shall speak to that procurator in a way he never heard mortal tongue deliver itself; but now I have to answer this mean hireling, who would plead my cause if I only paid him enough to do so. I have to do a little preliminary work; the Holy Ghost bids me say this and say no more." We might do a great deal of preaching in that way if the Church would allow us; but the Church always brings its own thermometer and barometer along with it, for the purpose of measuring heats and temperatures and weights and atmospheric conditions. The merchant can be preaching Christianity in his business without ever letting it be known that he ever spent one moment on his knees. It is not necessary to be a theologian to be a great preacher. Men can preach Christianity and defend the Cross in temper, actions, family and commercial relations, and beget a state of mental wonder on the part of the observers as to how such things happen to be as they are. By-and-by such men may be sent for, that they may speak concerning the mystery; that they may tell how it is that they did not take all that they might have clutched; how it was that honesty triumphed over perfidy, and how it could possibly be that a man could say, "No," when by saying "Yes" he might have secured a competence. In the after-talks, when the babbling Tertullus

has gone, the great mystery of personal consciousness, personal honour, and personal sacrifice may be revealed and declared.

In making his defence, Paul keeps to the Scriptures : "believing," said he, in the fourteenth verse, "all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." This was so much gained ; but it was a generality that wanted accent, so he proceeds, in the sixteenth verse, to supply the accent which was required : "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." There you have the complete character—the student plunged in the mysteries of the Scriptures—the man drilling himself, under Divine inspiration and encouragement, in moral integrity and sanctity ; recognising the supremacy of conscience and training the ethical faculty to the highest sensitiveness and the most penetrating discernment.

This was moral preaching ? I would God we had more moral preaching, then ! The man who is severe with his own conscience will know how to treat the consciences of other men ; the man who lives in conscience will be a tremendous preacher when the occasion arises for him to address conscience. Paul, at this stage in the speech, gives us a hint of the power which he will exercise by-and-by when he confronts Felix alone. No man can preach to the conscience, with any truly gracious and happy effect, who does not attend to his own conscience. Herein have we confidence in the great Apostle. His genius we might have learned to neglect, his great intellectual sagacity might have fallen into the familiarity which brings with it indifference, if not contempt ; but so long as he stands up a conscientious man, a righteous man, we cannot but respect and venerate him. Nothing will stand in the world's estimation for ever but downright in-and-out goodness. No preacher can live on mere foam of words ; no lecturer on the platform can have an everlasting reputation who neglects the moral nature of his audiences ; no book can be a perpetual monitor that has in it only flippancy and humour and laughter. He will have supreme influence whose character is like a pillar on the top of which there is lily-work. The lily-work does nothing for the pillar : the pillar does its own bearing work : it has the weight upon it ; and yet the lily-work is praised by the children, praised by infantile minds ; the little, frail, pretty lily-work will attract more attention than the upright, solid, all-bearing pillar. Never

mind, pillar ; we rest on thee, we trust to thee. There are temporary reputations which will pass away ; but at the last the pillar may be spoken of, because it so nobly, strongly, and quietly carried the whole burden. So it is with conscience. It is the righteousness of the world that saves it, not ten geniuses, ten poets, ten dreamers, ten defenders, but ten righteous men. Whilst they pray, the fire-shower, the fire-storm, will not descend.

LXXXIX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are thine in Jesus Christ, thy Son ; we are born again unto thee by the power of the Spirit ; we are no more wanderers : we are little children at home. We remember our wandering that we may mourn it ; we set before our eyes our sonship that we may magnify thy grace. We are the miracles of God ; we are the proofs of Divine Providence ; we show how tenderly thou dost care for the sons of men, and how plentifully thou dost supply the necessities of the soul. We do not go abroad for witness : when witness is required we stand up ourselves and say, " The Lord is good, and his tender mercies are over all his works." May we abide in this testimony, for in it is our strength. May we remind ourselves of it in the dark and cloudy day, lest the tempter be too strong for us, and by many a well-plied seduction draw us from the steadfastness of our love. We would hear in our souls all the vows and promises we have ever been enabled to utter, and we would cause these to repeat themselves, that in their hearing the soul may take courage again, even when the storm is dark and loud. Thy goodness towards us is a daily revelation ; it is not an occasional, it is an everlasting presence. Thy mercy endureth for ever. There is no point in all the space of our life that is not made golden by the touch of thy gracious love. It well becometh us, therefore, to stand up together, a unanimous host, to bless the Lord in loud psalm and cheerful anthem for his great love, his tearful pity, his redeeming grace, his Cross of sacrifice and atonement. We would become accustomed to the thought and service of the better world. As the years run away here and make us old, so eternity comes nearer to endow us with everlasting youth. So would we look onward and upward and find in anticipation the joy which cannot be found in retrospect. We look up unto the hills whence cometh our help—the eternal hills, the pillars of creation, the bases of thine own throne, the hills of sapphire, the mountains of light, the highlands of glory ; and as we look may our help come, and as we gaze may our strength be increased manifold, that we may praise thee, and with new confidence do thy work in the world, hoping ever in God, and making ourselves young at the throne of the heavenly grace. Show us how large is thy pity, thy love, thy tenderness ; give us to feel that thou hast made us men, with many natures, many passions, enthusiasms, powers, and faculties—a wondrous mystery, a creation of omnipotence everything perfect in its place and order and purpose ; a wondrous instrument on which thou

canst discourse music pleasing to thine own ear. May we be men, baptized in every faculty and power, exercising every one to thine honour and to thy glory—whole men, complete in their cultivation and entire in their consecration. To this end thou wilt not spare the inspiring Spirit. Thou wilt not keep back the light that makes all beauteous things grow and flourish ; neither wilt thou withhold the gracious rains which satisfy the thirsting souls, and make them rejoice in newness of strength. Thou dost lead us through the world and show us its great kingdoms and glories ; thou dost lift them up to set them down again ; thou dost reveal them—not to show their greatness, but their littleness. Their wealth is a lie if it be not made good and precious by sanctification. All the world can give is given for a moment, and taken back again, or dies in the eager grasp ; but thy peace abideth for ever, quieting the soul, giving the spirit enjoyment, far beyond all rack and noise and tumult. Thy peace is a peace that passeth understanding, and in its enjoyment we forget all harass and care and fret and toil, and feel that we are already enclosed within the gate which is one pearl. We bless thee for all thy love ; it is so tender, so continual, so full of all-gracious ministry ; it is as a nurse, as a shepherd, as a physician, as a mother ; it takes upon itself all beautiful names and symbolisms, and comes to us through the medium of everything in life that most we prize. We pray for one another. Hear the prayers we cannot speak, because there are no words fit for the expression of such necessities. Hear the soul's sighing, and interpret it into deep and intense and complete confession and supplication. Listen to us when we cannot hear the whisper of our own moaning, and render unto us great answers of joy. Open our way when the gate is high, and it is locked, and we have no key, and we stand there in our helplessness looking beyond and looking above ; let the looking be regarded as a prayer, and come thou to throw back the gate and permit us to go forward. Help us to keep the vow we have spoken. Thou knowest how liable it is to breach and flaw and compromise. Enable us to hold it in its integrity, to work it out in all its uttermost meaning of goodness ; so that, having withstood, we may stand ; having fought, we may come home at eventide as conquerors. The Lord have us where his jewels are kept ; the Lord write our name above the flames that shall consume all meaner things ; the Lord give us rest in the upper sanctuary—calm as the Divine peace, secure as the Divine strength. Amen.

Acts xxiv. 24, 25.

24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

PAUL'S PRIVATE SPEECH.

WE have often seen Paul in public ; we have now to study somewhat his private ministry. It is easier to speak upon Mars' Hill to a great crowd than to speak in a gilded chamber to two eminent personages. Will Paul be the same man in both places ? The persons who are listening to him are Felix and Drusilla. There the matter might be supposed to end. If we add to it the intense effect which the discourse produced, as represented in the words " Felix trembled," the case seems to be a small one. Yet as we study it the lines expand and multiply until it becomes symbolical and presses closely upon our own lives and habits. Look at the case in detail : the auditors are great people, yet the Gospel does not spare them. We have already learned somewhat concerning Felix ; let us recall our information that it may give colour and accent to this particular event. Felix was a Roman procurator ; he was originally a slave ; he became a freed man, and he rose to power almost unlimited. He was, therefore, in some way, unquestionably, a man of genius and invincible will—bent, but never broken. He and his brother Pallas were in high favour with Claudius Cæsar, the emperor, and in equally high favour with Antonia, the emperor's mother. They were the richest men, probably, in that part of the empire. When the emperor himself complained of being poor, he was told, with much suggestion in the tone, that if he would enter into partnership with Felix and Pallas, he would soon be a wealthy man. The historian tells us also, with much reading between the wide lines, that Felix was at the same time the husband of three queens. A more contemptible personage, history concurs in testifying, never combined the power of a king with the meanness of a slave. That was the one hearer. Drusilla was one of the beauties of her day ; she was the daughter of one king and the wife of another. Felix employed Simon, a magician, to cajole her from her constancy. She allied herself with Felix—another incidental tribute to the marvellous fascination of the man. In this unholy marriage a son was born, whose name was Agrippa. The mother and son both perished in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius which took place in the days of Titus Cæsar. That was the other hearer ; and Paul

was in their power. Was ever such goodness in the power of such wickedness? This will try Paul; the auditors are only two in number; he himself is a prisoner—well-nigh a slave—a word, and he is thrown to the lions; a nod, and the fire will consume him, bone and muscle. He will trip, he will falter, he will say something that will lead him into the pity and confidence of his illustrious auditors. Here is the true Apostle face to face with evil; he smites it with both hands alone, yet he feels the breath upon him of more than twelve legions of angels. He will have harvesting here if he can get it; he will take away from this field two sheaves, if possible, and garner them in heaven. This is a terrible Gospel—the power of God unto salvation or unto destruction, a savour of life unto life or of death unto death. These are the instances that commend the Gospel to our confidence. This is the man who said, not long ago in our studies, “Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.” How he looks through the villainy of the occasion! how he dares its feebleness! how he shows his penetration of the natural cowardice of wrong! Who was procurator then? Who was emperor? It is moral dignity that elevates a man up above his fellows to a height which never can be attained by merely intellectual genius. See not Paul the man only, but Paul the Christian—nay, see the incarnate Gospel itself shut up with these two violators of all holy law, and how it torments them, bites them, and will not spare them one moment. The sword of the Lord! the sword of the Lord, my brethren, and the battle is won; your old sword of paste-board, and the fight is lost; the blade of Jerusalem, and none other; the battle is not yours, but God’s. We cannot dwell too long, too gratefully, upon the moral dignity of this Gospel. It will not spare great people—no people can be great before its majesty. There is a light that puts out the sun. The sun is a great light in itself—a marvellous, dazzling eye; but there is a light that shames it away, that makes it retire in conscious feebleness. There is no greatness before the Gospel. The Christian is the king. The only monarchy that is not tinsel is the monarchy of holiness. All kings and queens, Cæsars and thrones—all of them are baubles and lies and vanities if they represent not a monarchy greater than themselves. Because the Gospel speaks in this tone it lives for ever. Righteousness is the eternal quantity.

The auditors were but two in number, yet the Gospel sought to save them. The Gospel is the one-man religion. When Christianity takes the census it counts every man one, and says to despairing preachers, teachers, and evangelists, "Let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death." Christianity despises no one; Christianity is the shepherd that will not rest until the hundredth sheep be found. "Ninety-and-nine"—there is no music in these chiming syllables, because one of the flock has gone astray. This is another aspect of the Gospel, equal in pathos to the aspect which has just passed before us as clothed with moral grandeur. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." Other religions go by numbers, by empires; they count multitudinously: they count a nation one. The individual life is a fleck, a drop of a bucket, a very little thing, not to be named. But the religion of Jesus Christ, having found that one of the ten pieces is lost, instantly lights a candle and sweeps the house diligently until it be found. Christianity, having found that one of the lambs has gone astray, will neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep, nor hold the customary feast until the wanderer is back again. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." So, every man is a congregation. Our ministers must be rebuked if they count more than one man in the house. There is only one man in all the populations of the earth, and he is lost and must be found. Oh, preacher! every man is a congregation; the meanest, poorest creature that crouches within hearing distance is a nation—the world; know thy duty, and in Christ's great strength win the fight. Earnestness can always speak to the individual. There is no affront that can be offered to the spirit of the Gospel more deadly than to withhold because the numbers are not overwhelming. If one soul is within ear-shot, he constitutes the supreme occasion of any ministry. The Gospel has thunder for the crowd and whispers for the one listener. That is the truth. Jesus Christ often spoke to the one hearer; Jesus made revelations to individual hearers greater than any he ever made to the crowd. If we might compare the discourses of the perfect Speaker, we might say, by the accommodation of human language, that the most splendid discourses of the Messiah were delivered to solitary

listeners. What said he to the woman all sin from the strange city? When she spoke of Messiah, he said, "I that speak unto thee am he." When did he say that to a crowd? What said he to the woman all grief, because she had buried all her heart? "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And so trace his history, and you will find that to individual hearers he communicated his greatest messages. What said he in the hush of night to Nicodemus? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Produce the match of these discourses from all the public deliverances of the Divine Speaker. When he spoke in public he spoke in another tone: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Even there the same sublime doctrine is conveyed: mark, the invitation is to the one thirsting man. But, whilst the preacher may find some difficulty here, the listener himself may imagine that he is too small to be addressed in his individuality. Whilst he is in the congregation, he may imagine himself lost in the crowd—he is only part of the urgent occasion. We must have individuality of hearing as well as individuality of preaching. The true hearer is the man who supposes himself to be the only listener in all the sanctuary—who is so absorbed in spiritual earnestness and attention that he hears every word as if spoken to himself alone—a message just delivered from the great Father to the one wandering child. Such preaching, equalled by such hearing, and the next step is a converted world. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

In the third place, the auditors asked for entertainment; yet the Gospel gave them judgment. The Gospel has no entertainments. Felix sent for Paul to hear him concerning the faith in Christ. Felix cared nothing for this himself, for he was a Roman; but Drusilla was a Jewess, and she was the occasion of this interest in Christian matters. She had heard of her famous countryman, called Jesus of Nazareth; he had been murdered and done away with, but still his religion was exciting a good deal of curiosity in the country, and she, being a Jewess, would hear somewhat of her eccentric compatriot. So we become interested in certain sides

and aspects of questions. Drusilla could have no interest in the spiritual Christ. He would burn her ; but she had intellectual interest, or the interest of curiosity in the historical magician, the prince of the wonder-workers. It is not enough to be interested in Christ : we must first know what Christ it is in whom we are interested. Felix and Drusilla would hear the animated story about the wondrous sorcerer ; Paul was an expert, a devotee—he would know about the whole case and would be able to explain it, and now he was at liberty to tell the tale. “ And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment.” Is that the faith that is in Christ? Yes. You thought Christianity was theology—Christianity is morality. Let us call the prisoner Paul, and hear him concerning the famous Jew—who was he? what was he? what did he do? what was he like? Tell us in graphic words all he did. “ And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Was that Christian preaching? Verily ; and the preaching we want every day. Many are delighted with high theological cobweb speculation, and call it marvellous. It is not Christian preaching. The true preaching makes the robber empty his pockets, makes the bad man white with inward accusation, makes the oppressor turn uneasily on his seat as if he were sitting on thorns and fire, turns the bad man mad, and makes him say foamingly at the church door that he will never come back again. That is preaching concerning the faith that is in Christ. The audience should always suggest the subject. This was Paul’s method, and, as we have seen in our studies in the Gospel according to Matthew, it was the invariable method of Jesus Christ himself. The audience is the text ; this is where our speakers fail so much. The audience is but a company of listeners, or a company of men who may listen or not listen, as they please, and all the great speakers, from Christ downward, including the great Apostle Paul himself, made the audience the text, expounded the text to itself, held a mirror up to nature. This must always be the case. What do our hearers want with speculations they cannot follow, with dreams they never heard of? He who would preach to the times must preach to the broken-heartedness of the day, to the criminality of the hour, to the inconstancy of the times, to the disloyalty of the army. Away—farther and farther still—the impious thought that only he preaches to the

times who preaches about thoughts that people never heard of, and answers arguments which they can neither comprehend nor remember. He preaches to the times who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I, the Son of God, will give you rest." These are the eternal times, the other so-called times are flickering moments, changing their colour, changing their throb and pulse by an incalculable process; but the eternal need is forgiveness, the everlasting want is rest for the soul. This advice will never make popular preachers: it will make Pauline preachers, terrible preachers—preachers whose sentences are thorns and goads, whose looks are judgments, and whose tones are accusations. May the good Lord of the harvest thrust into his harvest-field many such preachers! Vice is none the less vice because it is gilded and can pay its way. Felix was a rich man, his wife was partner of his property; their roof was gilded, their walls were velvety, their carpets were flowers, soft and fragrant, their wine was plentiful, and they drank it out of nothing less than gold; but the vice was the worm at the core. Nothing is settled until it is rectified; the wall must totter if it is out of plumb. Judge the Gospel theology by Gospel morality. We are not sent to make theologians, but Christians; we are not sent to build up a system, but to build up a character. How does it come that the Gospel holds its own amongst all the competing religions of the world? Because of its morality. The morality of the Gospel is not a scheme or theory of manners; it is the expression of a profound and sublime theology. The true God is above it, the true Cross is at its centre, and therefore its balances are equal, its measures are just, its actions are transparent, its character is without a spot. Men can understand our morality when they cannot understand our theology. It is possible that many may be calling for entertainment who ought to be asking for a judgment. We do not come to the throne of God to be hugged and comforted and confectioned, to be sprinkled with scented water, and to be assured that we are ripe for anything Heaven may have to disclose. Some may be far enough on the road to claim such high privileges and sacred enjoyments, but the most of us are still where we need to be reasoned with concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. I know not what may be the case of special individuals, but taking the world in its totality,

as representing one humanity this day, it needs only the theology which ends in morality, and it cries for the morality which is magnified, sanctified, inspired, and assured by the theology of Christ. This is our standing ground. Come, Felix, Drusilla, Zaccheus, Lazarus, beggar at the gate, blind man on the roadside, we have but one speech—the forgiveness of sin through its confession at the Cross and through the blood of Christ.

XC.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, power belongeth unto thee, and also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy. We have nothing to say to thy power ; we turn away from it and look with all eagerness and expectancy to thy tender mercy and thy loving-kindness. Yet we are glad of thy power ; one day we will run into it and hold it for our uses, but not until we have seen thee in Christ, and received from thee the word of pitiful compassion, the assurance of entire forgiveness. Make us glad in thy mercy, give us joy at the Cross ; thou alone canst make the human heart glad with true joy. We come to thee this day to lay our burden and to receive thy blessing, that we may henceforth walk in the light of thy love, being at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then will come the joy of sonship ; following adoption into thy family shall come rapture and triumph, and sense of eternal security. Surely then we shall lift up our heads as children of the day, and in our life there shall be no night ; in all our prayer there shall be no halting, but the outgoing of our heart towards the heavens shall be an outgoing of perfect love. We bless thee for all the sunshine of life. Surely thou dost not spare the light ; thou dost pour it out of the horn of infinite fulness, and there is more at the end than at the beginning ; there are more suns in the night than in the day. We bless thee for all hope which gives us the full possession of our strength ; we thank thee for the inspirations breathed into us by the Holy Ghost, whereby we are lifted up above the fear of death, and already enter into possession of heavenly rest and comfort. We will bless thee with many a psalm, and make a joyful noise unto thee in thy house, and our whole heart shall lift itself up to thee in all the spirit of tender love and ineffable thankfulness. We cannot tell thee the tale of our daily need ; it has no name because it has no measure. We have nothing that we have not received. Every good gift we have, and every perfect gift we recognise as coming from the Father of light. We ourselves are not our own, for we are bought with a price ; we are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God ; therefore do we reckon ourselves not by ourselves, but by God's ransom. Surely thou didst buy thine own image and likeness with thine own blood. This is our value ; this is our immortality. Sometimes, when we look at thy heavens—the sun and the moon and the stars—we think ourselves not worth redeeming ; then, behold, there is an uprising of the heart in its conscious strength and dignity, and we pour contempt upon all the uni-

verse, for it burns but for a day. We are the people of thine hand, the sheep of thy pasture, redeemed with blood, bought with an infinite preciousness of price, and therefore do we stand up among the angels and among the princes of heaven. Whilst we are upon the earth, help us to do its daily work diligently, faithfully, and successfully. We do not want to do it, and therefore the doing of it is good for us ; it curbs the will, it cools the passion, it rebukes a strength that might be turned to vanity. Help us, therefore, to bear the yoke without complaining, to do our duty, and to find in it a religious delight, because of its disciplinary influence. Then, when this poor little elementary work is done, take us up, with purified spirit and enlarged power, to the ampler service, to the day not rounded with a night. The Lord be pitiful to us and dry our tears when we cannot lift our own hands to touch them ; the Lord be with us all the night time, and give us rest in sleep. The Lord be praised for restoration from affliction ; some of thy servants have seen long imprisonment because of pain and feebleness, and to-day they rejoin the holy hymn and sacred prayer. Receive their thanksgiving, confirm thy mercy in them, and carry on their healing to perfectness. The Lord heal us all ; the Lord make our afflictions the beginnings of our true strength ; the Lord comfort us according to the wound of the heart. Now let light fill the house in every corner—a great, broad light above the brightness of the sun—in the shining of which we shall forget the days of earth and time. Speak to every heart ; let thy whisper come into the secret places of every spirit, and a great, broad blessing fall upon the whole people ; and hear the people when they say, in the name of Christ, Amen.

Acts xxiv. 26, 27.

26. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him : wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and com-muned with him.

27. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix's room ; and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

FELIX REDIVIVUS.

I THINK it can be shown that Felix is yet alive. It is a wonderful characteristic of the Bible that all its characters are still with us. If the character is the man, then the man is still alive. His father and his mother and his sisters and himself—are they not all with us ? Adam is still living, and Eve is yet at his side ; Cain, the murderer, is still abroad, still shedding blood, still inspiring society with fear ; and all the rest of the Biblical characters are in full force in our own country. Let me repeat, how

wonderful a feature this is in Biblical portraiture. The men of the Bible were not mere individuals : they were types, they were symbols. Felix was sated with flattery ; no man dare say one critical word to Felix ; his capacity, in the matter of approbation, was simply immeasurable. Wherever he came men stood up, nor dare they sit down until they received his haughty permission. Whoever spoke to him accosted him as a kind of god. Is that Felix not still amongst us—the man who always lives amongst his idolaters, the man who will not hear the critical word, or who would resent it almost with death if he could ? Are there not men whose minds are narrowed and perverted by always living in the sickly and sickening atmosphere of adulation ? They would be better men if they came out into the fresh wind ; for a time they might have to suffer something, but from even pungent, not to say intelligent, criticism they might learn something ; it is lawful to learn from the enemy. Surely if the Felix sated with adulation is not living, the Felix who would like to be so sated is a million strong. I am distinguishing in my own mind, in making these observations, between just appreciation and foolish idolatry—between the praise which is due to character and the hypocrisy which is offered to mere position.

Felix was interested in religious discussions : “ he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” That Felix is still alive—the bad man who likes to go to church once a day ; the worldly grasping, avaricious man who likes to spice his life with religious metaphysics and religious controversies. It is curious, it is almost comical, yet it is most pitifully true. Who can explain it, or account for it, that a man, whose life is wholly given to the earth, should, now and again, desire to hear a prayer, or listen to a discourse, or take part even in a religious controversy, and have his “ views ” ? What a contradiction is man ! See him sometimes, and you would say that his life was given up to prayer, to religious reading, and to religious listening : he likes a sermon, he would not miss going to church—he would sell you to-morrow at any price he can get for you ; still he has his “ views.” Alas ! who made him ? An anomaly he is ; if he was ever made, surely he has unmade himself. Have you not often met that same Felix ?

Felix lived in sin : he did not dabble in it, he was no retail

criminal ; he lived, he wallowed in sin. Is it possible that a man can live in sin and yet send for an apostle to speak " concerning the faith in Christ " ? It is not only possible, it is the daily use of men, it is the common practice of society. Herein we are to some extent—not an equal extent—all in the same condemnation. This is the mystery of life : that only yesterday we shattered every commandment of Heaven and to-day we are—outwardly at least—standing at heaven's gate ! There is hope in this ; there is something in this we would not willingly let die. Surely there is a mystery of hope and love in this contradiction. Do not let us take wholly the black view of it. We can look at the sin until we see Felix turning into a living child of the devil ; or we can look at him, sending for the Apostle Paul, until we think we see spots of whiteness even on the black disc of his character. " Surely," we say, " this time the meaning is good, and Paul will leave Felix a better man." That is what we think of every one who leaves the husks that the swine do eat, in order that he may present himself at the table of the sanctuary and eat the bread which cometh down from heaven—the true bread. Better dwell on the bright side ; better say concerning your brother Felix, " He means to be right, and the right will come uppermost."

We may the more confidently say this when we find that Felix was morally impressible. This is proved by words which you find in the twenty-fifth verse—" Felix trembled." Then there is hope of him. He was not wholly beyond the line of impression ; prayer could still find him, appeal could still excite him, a masterly presentation of facts could still confound him ; his conscience was not dead, but sleeping. Are there not such men amongst us in hundreds and thousands—men who never hear a sermon without weeping, men who even like a sermon the more when it wrings their conscience and turns them white with fear ? There is a possibility of becoming too familiar with that kind of emotion ; there is a possibility of expecting it, of measuring discourses and services by its presence, of boasting of the excellence of the appeal because it made both ears tingle, caused the conscience to start bolt upright, and accused the whole life of sin—so strangely are we compounded. We have rejoiced in the analytic power of the preacher who takes us all to pieces and shows us to ourselves, fibre by fibre ; but we have taken the analysis as a proof of his ability,

and not as an evidence of our own corruption. Marvellous that we like to be vivisected ! We call the preacher faithful, and, having paid him the compliment, we go out to repeat the sin he has rebuked ; we recommend the book as heart-searching, mind-penetrating, and, having brought a hundred customers to it, we renew the iniquity that it depicted with such startling vividness. This is the mystery of man. This is the kind of manhood every theory must cover if it would touch the tremendous reality of the facts.

Felix was open to bribery amidst all this conflict of emotion. See the proof in the twenty-sixth verse—" He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him." Felix did not stand alone in this hope. Felix, perhaps, did not know that it was criminal, as we interpret and understand that term. Men become accustomed to crime until they do not know it, and repeat it as a kind of virtue. It is the custom of the trade ; it is the usage of the profession ; it is always expected that it should be so. If Felix stood right out alone as a receiver of bribes, he would burn with blushing shame ; but his hand had been accustomed to be stretched out for the bribe as the hands of Englishmen are stretched out this day. Do not blacken Felix as if he were raised up to be the monster of iniquity in this department. We do not always take the bribe in the form of money ; we have lived long enough and sufficiently under Christian education to know that the gift of money is the vulgarest form of bribe under some circumstances ; but there is a wonderful mystery of giving and taking still. If the act were isolated, we could detest it, but being part of a system, the custom or usage, then we do not like to make ourselves singular and condemn the practice. Wondrous is this action of hope unexpressed ! Wondrous is the power or genius of suggestion ! Paul was often sent for, but Paul never suspected the design. Evil be to him who evil thinks. Paul might receive the invitations as expressive of a real desire to know more about these religious mysteries. We operate from such different motives ; we do not always fully understand the motive which impels us in this or that direction. Sometimes we dare not say in words exactly and definitely what we mean and what we want : we suggest, we hint, we remotely indicate, we represent other people and other circumstances, meaning to make parables

of them to reveal what we dare not express. This is man, this is ourselves—mystery of mysteries. Here let me repeat with ever-increasing urgency and even vehemence, that this is the kind of man who must be treated by any theory which professes to lift the human race to a new level and to a new hope. We are not dealing with superficial creatures ; in a sense we ourselves are infinite—not infinite in a lineal sense, signifying that no tape-line is long enough to lay upon our life, but infinite in the variety of our evil-mindedness, in our cunning and subtlety, in our selfishness and vanity, never repeating ourselves, but always cunningly rearranging the appeal so as to secure the identical issue. No man must come to treat a creature of this kind as if the disease were cutaneous, as if it were intermittent and might be mitigated by sundry casual and incidental means. The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint ; it is a vital case.

Felix was kind to preachers ; the proof is found in the twenty-third verse—“ And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.” He was a kind of free prisoner—a kind of prisoner at large. That Felix is still living. Some of the most generous friends I have ever had have been men who made no profession of religion and who yet liked to come to church—great-hearted men, liberal souls, to whose table and garden you might go week after week—men who loved the preacher with even a fond affectionateness. That, too, is a mystery, but a mystery with an answer. Who can tell the range or explain the ministry of sympathy ? The men have not been bad men, though non-professing men. A man is not necessarily a bad man because he does not belong to this or that form of Christian life. The man to whom I refer (speaking of him typically and not personally) is a man who yearns after something better, longs for it, and believes that after all—as I believe—he will not be a castaway. In his heart he says, “ I think Christ will even yet find me ; I am roughly made, very rude in mind, just a piece of living self-contradiction—I want to pray and to blaspheme in the same breath—but I feel that when all comes to all, even I may be found on the uttermost fringe and be recognised as one whose better feelings were stronger than the feelings that were worse.” That may be so ; I do not know the number of the

elect, I cannot tell whether there be few that be saved ; God is Sovereign, Redeemer, Lord ; and this I have heard of him from the house of Aaron, and from every house descended from that illustrious line, " his mercy endureth for ever." Herein the preacher has an infinite advantage over other men. No man has such an opportunity for revealing himself as the preacher has ; it is the preacher's highest duty to reveal his soul in its truest qualities. What wonder if strangers and people unrecognised hearing the voice should say, " This is the shepherd's voice, the voice of love ; I will answer it as the scribe answered the great Preacher—Well, Master, thou hast said the truth " !

Felix was procrastinating ; the proof of this is found in the twenty-fifth verse—" he answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." It was not a rude dismissal ; it was not an appeal followed by a penalty ; there was a longing for the very whip that scourged him. Sometimes we do think that laceration is equal to repentance ; we are prone to think that when we are well scourged we have really answered the Divine will—that is a profound, but common mistake. Is the procrastinating man still with us ? Dare I descend to particulars and ask that man to stand up ? He is here : he is in every church ; he is in every city. He does not mean to give it up ; he says, " I will return in the evening." He cannot renounce the spiritual ministry and kingdom ; a ghost follows him and says, " Return !" and he answers, " I will." He may come for entertainment, he may come to be instructed, he may come to be merely electrified ; still he will certainly, as to his purpose, return. But, why return ? You urge men in business to complete the transaction ; why complain of the preacher if the preacher should say, " Carry out your own exhortation, be faithful to your own argument and complete the transaction now " ?

In these seven particulars I think we have found a Felix who is still living, namely, (1) the man who is sated by flattery, (2) interested in religious discussions, (3) living in sin, (4) morally im-pressible, (5) open to bribery, (6) kind to preachers, (7) procrastinating in spirit. In Felix I see that double action which is so characteristic of every man, which excites the observer, and, in-

deed, excites the subject himself. Sometimes the good is uppermost, and then the bad, and then again the good ; and we say, looking on, " Which will win ? " To-day he prays—in the evening he has returned to his vomit ; to-day the tears are standing in his eyes, and he wrings his friend's hand suggestively, meaning to say by that wringing, " I will conquer yet "—in a few hours he turns away from his friend as if he would rather not confront his searching face. It is a marvellous action. We say—the wife says, " He will come right after all " ; the child says, " Father will soon be a good man ; I saw him, though his back was turned to me, the other day reading a portion of the Bible." Then we meet those witnesses, and they are dumb : they have no evidence to bear this day. To-morrow we meet them, and their faces are gleaming and their hands are put out in salutation, and they whisper, " There is still hope ; he will conquer yet ! " We, also, are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses—the loved ones who have left the race, the sainted ones who have completed the battle—and they are looking down and watching us ; and surely—if we may regard them as yet possessing human emotions—they may be saying, concerning the husband, the wife, the loved son, " Still there is hope, he prays." She lifts up her voice to the blue morning—" He is groping, groping for something better ! there is still hope." Then the watchers are silent ; and in that silence we read our own ill behaviour—we are on the wrong road, we are speaking the wrong tone, we are bowing at forbidden altars. Then again the voice is heard—" There is still hope ; the devil will lose after all ; my loved one will yet come in—saved by fire—still will be saved."

Let us this day, in God's strength, so act as to give joy in the presence of the angels of God over many a sinner that repenteth. Left to ourselves, the struggle can only go one way ; aided by Christ, it is still a struggle, but a struggle that must end in victory. " I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." Practical Christianity is the only guarantee even of judicial integrity. How far-spreading is the influence of Christianity ! How it assails the fountain and works mightily and healingly at the heart of things ! How it deals with root and core rather than with branch and shell ! It is the world's hope ; it makes the bad man

tremble ; it breaks the rod of the oppressor ; it melts ill-gotten gold, and makes it run through the crevices of the casket hidden in dark places ; it makes night hideous with avenging dreams. But as for those who know it, they shall be called God's angels—they shall be numbered with God's jewels.

XCI.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost keep the soul of them that love thee, and no harm can come nigh unto them because of the defence of thine arm. Thou art round about us as the hills and mountains are round Jerusalem. Thou dost not forget us, because we have set our love upon thee: thou dost answer us with an infinite affection. We live at thy table; we sleep within the curtain of thy darkness and lay our weary head upon the pillow of thy providence. We are altogether thine; we have nothing that we have not received. Behold, we cannot lay our hand upon anything and say, "This is wholly ours." We are made by the Lord; we occupy at the Lord's bidding; we are tenants at will. Thou dost bid us quit our earthly house of this tabernacle, and instantly, or lingeringly, we go. Thou changest our countenance and sendest us away. We have no power against thee. Would that our will might be wholly thine, following in daily music all the wondrous way of thy purpose! Then should we live in harmony; in our life there should be no ruffle or discord, but one great melody, one holy peace. This we have come to know through Jesus Christ our Lord: he told us about the Father, about the numbering of the hairs of our head, about our Father's good pleasure. We know thee in thy Son; we have seen thee in the Gospel of our Saviour. So now we come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Every time is a time of need; we are helpless all the while. None may boast of his strength, for it is but a flower; none can say surely that he standeth, for in so saying he falleth. Thou wilt not have boasting: thou wilt have reliance, dependence, trust, love, obedience—not arbitrarily, but rationally, and because thou art the infinite Creator and we the creatures of a day. We bless thee for thine house upon the earth. The tabernacle of God is with men; the walls of thine house adjoin the walls of our dwelling-place. May all the habitations of the city be sanctuaries of the living God, having the upper rooms consecrated to the service of the King. For all times of sweet fellowship and reunion of our best life we thank thee. These cold, grey Sabbaths of time are hints and dim symbols of the one Sabbath that spreads its infinite calm over thine own eternity. May we seize the spirit of the occasion. May we be lifted up, by the power of the Holy Ghost, so as to lay hold upon things far off and make them nigh at hand. May we look with the angels into mysteries Divine; whilst we look may our hearts burn within us, and in that hour may we see the Father and the Son and the Holy

Ghost—Three in One, One in Three—and without asking explanation, which can but satisfy our vanity, may we fall down in the worship which lifts up the soul, and abase ourselves with the abasement which goes before exaltation. Wherein thou hast showed us trouble, thou hast also showed unto us treasures of joy. Wherein thou hast parted us for a little time, our coming together has been quickened into the greater gladness; and now that we stand close to one another, in the family house, we bless thee with a family song. Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort us. Hear our psalm of thankfulness, and let thine hand be upon us for good evermore. Yet are we not all here. We pray for those whom we have left at home. May the home have a new light within it this day—a resurrection gleam, a hint of better worlds and wider spaces, where the inhabitants shall no more say, “I am sick.” And some are in heaven, and we ourselves, because of their ascension, are hardly upon the earth; we are in a great bewilderment—we put out our hands to find what is not to be found in time or space; there is a sounding in our ears as of music from bright places. Surely our loved ones are still loved, and those who made our life double are not quite taken away. We commend one another to thy care. Our life is brief; there is no room in the few days for quarrel and clamour and strife, but only room and time to pray and work and love. Let the Spirit of the blessed Christ be in us; let his Gospel be our assurance for the life that now is and the life that is to come, and through the mystery of his sacrifice may we find peace with God. Amen.

Acts xxv. 1-27.

1. Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

2. Then the high-priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

3. And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

4. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

5. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

6. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, commanded Paul to be brought.

7. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

8. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended anything at all.

9. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me ?

10. Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged : to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

11. For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die : but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.

12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar ? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.

13. And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus.

14. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix :

15. About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

16. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

17. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

18. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed :

19. But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

20. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

21. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar.

22. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

23. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

24. And Festus said, king Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

25. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death,

and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

26. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

27. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

CHRISTIAN EPOCHS.

WE are now in the midst of great historical scenes. The painter cannot let them alone. There are some subjects which will not let man alone until they have been taken up and received into the heart and reproduced either in the imagination or in the life. History is alive. There are some things which men willingly let die ; few and short are the prayers they say over them. But there are other things which will not die. They are charged with all the elements of immortality, music, poetry, colour—almost of vitality. They return upon the imagination ; they wait patiently, for they know that they must be magnified, illuminated, crowned as the supreme events of history. Paul before the governors and the kings is a subject which men must paint. There is a great deal of suggestion in that “ must.” God will have his gallery, and you cannot help it. So wondrous are the scenes that the painter must pray before he can paint them. We must be in sympathy with our subject, or we touch it only with the fingers ; it is the heart that sees, reproduces, paints, preaches, prays—the wondrous, mysterious Divine heart.

What a long life hatred has ! Two years had elapsed, but the elapse of the two years had not cooled the fury of the persecuting Jews. We leave some things to time, calling it “ all-healing Time.” Time cannot put hell out ! What can live so long as hatred ? Well might the Apostle warn the churches against “ bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour.” He was not talking then against time, or inventing some theory of human depravity ; he had felt the hatred which he deprecated. Religious hatred is the worst. Cain’s was a religious murder ; it was manslaughter at the altar. Nothing can strike so desperately as the

religious knife. The Church has herself to blame for the little progress Christianity has made in the world. She has been too fond of hatred, persecution, cruelty ; she has thought to scourge men into the Church. What wonder if the God she professes to serve has blocked up her wicked way ? Religious hatred thought less of murder than of ceremonial pollution. The Jews desired favour against Paul that Festus would send for him to Jerusalem ; and they would take care to have their assassins on the road to kill the hatred Christian. Yet these men would not eat until they had washed their hands ! Such piety always has its counterpart in equivalent villainy. The more you attend to mere ceremony the more you fritter away the substance of your character. If it is a point with you to be baptized in this way or in that way, you cannot understand the infinite love of the God who baptizes in every way. If you can only worship according to one form, you cannot worship at all ; you have not entered into the mystery of the infinite Presence that will receive you anywhere, and the bent knee shall be as a prayer, and the uplifted eye as an intercession, and the sighing of the heart as a violent assault of violent love upon the kingdom that wants to be taken. The ceremonialist is at least a contribution towards a murderer. All this goes together ; it is part and parcel of the same thing. He who is inhumanly pious about things of no importance is, in his heart, a child of Cain.

In the next place, how wondrously opportunities are created by human mistakes ! If we knew it, we are always creating opportunities for the revelation of the larger Providence. When we " think we are blocking up gates, we are really opening them " ; when we dig a pit for another man, we are certain to be buried in it before the sun goes down. That is right. Paul went to Jerusalem, and the elders—who are always juniors if they are only ceremonialists and technicalists—the very feeblest men in the Church—thought that Paul had better make a compromise : in order to do away with a suspicion, it might be well for him to purify himself in the temple. Weak-minded men ! If inspired, never was inspiration so misapplied.

If they had been out doing Paul's kind of work, they would have left compromise millions of miles behind them ; but they had been in the metropolis studying—always a very perilous and

risky business. Better be out somewhere working, facing practical difficulties, tackling the realities of life, looking at its awful tragedies and binding up its gaping wounds. So all this trouble came upon Paul through the weak-minded advice to compromise matters. Was it then a mistake? Clearly so. Did the Lord leave it as a human mistake? No; he turned it into a Divine opportunity. That mistake gave Paul his highest audiences. He was talking to rabbles before—just an open-air preacher, a man taking opportunities as they occurred—but now he was a preacher to procurators, rulers, kings, mighty men. Churches without a name were built for this greatest of the preachers. We know not what we do. Could we stand back in the eternity of God and watch men, we should not be troubled by their doings. When they are making weapons against us, we should say, “No weapon that is formed against me shall prosper.” We should have no fear; we should live in eternal Sabbath. “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Men can do nothing against you. There is only one man can do you any injury of a permanent kind, and that man is yourself. If you are right, you cannot be injured. I do not mean if you are holy—perfectly, ineffably, and infinitely holy—I mean if the set of your life is right, if your main purpose is right, if your dominating thought is right. Then your enemies will only be creating opportunities for you; the raging heathen and the people of the vain imagination are doing your pioneer work. Have no fear, true soul; thine inheritance is fixed by the Lord. He maketh the wrath of man to praise him; the remainder of that wrath he doth restrain. Thank God for enemies; they have made us what we are; they have been schoolmasters, disciplinarians. But for them we should not be half grown to-day: we should be mere babies still; but they forced us to read and think and pray, they drove us to it, they shut us up with the Eternal. Thank God for bitterest foes, and even for those weak-minded men who have advised us to make compromises. They were people of a nice heart, a quiet disposition, who had divided the days into four periods and had otherwise neatly arranged a little Providence of their own. They meant it well—may the Lord have mercy upon their souls!

In the third place, long-continued hardship had not soured the mind of Paul. That is the test of his quality. I know not of

any other man that would not have gone mad. After two years he is as sweet as ever. When he appears before Festus we mark in him the same quietness, the same dignity, the same defence—that is, Christianity. If it were a fight in words, the battle might go wrong for our cause sometimes, because there are worthy men against us, skilled much in the utterance of phrases, and sentences, and arguments; but it is an affair of the sweetness of the soul. O that eternal patience!—who can answer? Long-suffering is eloquence. To be found at the last just as snow-white in motive, just as pure and simple in purpose, just as sweet and loving in heart, as at the first—never tell me that some vain superstition wrought that miracle in the human mind. The miracle I cannot explain; there are its evidences and proofs. Does Paul speak of throwing up the Christian cause, abandoning the Cross? When Festus calls his Master “one Jesus” does Paul say, “I know not the man”? For two years he has been chained, taken out of his usual missionary work, withdrawn from the thick of the fight in which he delighted, and yet, at the end of the two years, he is as woman-like and child-like and Divine in spirit as if all the time he had been in a garden of delights, on the mountains of myrrh and on the hills of frankincense. What did it? Never has a Pharisee done this; this is a Christian miracle. Controversy never degenerated into mere quarrelling with the Apostle Paul. There never has been so great a debater, so tremendous an antagonist, and yet he always lived in the higher reaches of controversy. It was debate, not fret, and chafe, and resentment, and bitterness; it was noble speculation, not petty retaliation; it was the life of the revealer, not of the mere pedant; it was the ministry of a prophet, not the impetuous attempt of a man who was anxious to snatch a transient victory. Let the speaker interpret the speech; let the man be the noblest comment on the doctrine. If you will accept that challenge, the whole history of the New Testament will claim the supreme place in the critical estimation of mankind.

There are three remarkable things about Paul in this connection. (1) He represents spiritual influence. He cannot be left alone. Though he is in prison, he is out of jail; chained at Cæsarea, he is still an active presence in Jerusalem. You cannot get rid of some men. If you kill them, they will come up in some other personages, and haunt you as Herod was haunted by

the new man whom he suspected to be the beheaded John, though he himself was in theory a Sadducee, and did not believe in spiritual presences. But in the panic of the soul our theories go down. The Agnostic prays. This double life does not belong to the Christian thinker alone. If the Christian thinker be accused of sometimes acting unworthily of his prayers, many a man who professes to live under a sky of lead, prays, perhaps, when he does not know it. Prayer is not an affair of words, but of heart-ache and heart-wonder and mute desire, and the look that has the soul in it. Paul represented the kind of influence which follows society in a ghostly way, colouring its questions, lifting up its wonder into a kind of religion, troubling its conscience as if by a new standard of righteousness. (2) Paul represents also spiritual confidence. He would rather be fighting, but the Lord has appointed him to waiting. "It will all be well," says Paul. The old war-horse stirred in him—pawed, and longed for the fierce fray. But the Apostle says, "This is waiting time, halting time; God will see his child defended. The battle is not mine, but God's. It is better that I should be shut up in Cæsarea, that I may see how God can—at least, in the most energetic ways—do without me." Presently, he will see the meaning of it all, and write to his friends a letter in which he will say, "The things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel. Mistakes have been turned into helps, and blunders of mine have been turned into the opportunities of God." (3) Paul also represents the highest aspect of spiritual culture. He is being trained now; he is reading the smaller print in God's endless book; he is being mellowed. Some education in that direction of his character will do him no harm. All the land is better for the rain which softens it—aye, for the frost which reduces it to powder. From the human side, Paul was being punished; from the Divine side, he was being rested and trained. There are two sides in all human events. If we take the lower aspect of our life, we shall groan, fret, and chafe; we shall wonder why there were not more than twenty-four hours in the day, and why the year should not be stretched out into double lengths, and why there should not be two harvests within the extended circle; our hand can never have enough, and our imagination can only be tempted, not to satisfaction, but to new ambition or despair. But if we take

the upper view of life—that is to say, look down upon it from God's point—we shall see all things work together for good—see how the elements combine one with the other ; how marvellously the lines run, cross, and return, and complete striking figures—figures that are almost living presences ; see how mistakes are made account of, and how disappointments become the beginnings of prayer, and how the things that crushed us most at the time were amongst the greatest blessings of life. See, the garden blooms, but how more brightly here, and there, and yonder ! Why ? Under those bright places are the deep graves. Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and he will give thee thine heart's desire ; and, at the last—accosted by the voices of solicitous love and interest, “ Is it well with thee ? ” “ Is it well with thy husband ? ” “ Is it well with the child ? ”—thou shalt answer, “ It is well. ”

XCII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, be counted worthy at the last to take part in the song of Moses and the Lamb. We have hope that this shall be so, if our hearts condemn us not. We believe that thou dost speak through them the word of confidence. We feel that we must take part in the song which praises thee, for our whole life answers thy life, our whole nature rises in response to thy light. We love thee ; we love thy Son, by whom alone we know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Knowing the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, we would praise the great Three-One now and evermore. May we not lose the inspiration of the sanctuary, but rule the whole week with it, controlling and subduing everything by its holy power. Spirit of the living God, dwell in our hearts, burn in the sanctuary of our love, and let the radiation of thy glory touch every point of our life and make us beautiful with light. Sometimes we are standing quite near thee : we are upon the mountain whilst the dew is there ; we are lifted up so high in soul that we can see beyond the boundary and hear voices from upper lands. These are the days of the Son of man upon the earth ; these are the times that transfigure our life and make it burn with transcendent glory. Then we come down to fight the battle—to be stunned by the tumultuous fray in the valley ; then we forget the glory and cease to think of thee, and miss not, as we ought to do, the presence Divine. But thou knowest it all ; our life is not hidden from thee. Thou didst make it in all its curiosity and mystery, and strange wonder and terrible painfulness. It is thy life, not ours ; it is part of thine own eternity. Thou hast entrusted it to us ; and we know not, oftentimes, what to make of it. We say we would not live away ; we pine for rest, we cry for sleep : we know that unconsciousness has its blessing as well as consciousness. So thou dost take us aside awhile ; thou hast made a bed for us—soft and warm ; thou dost lay us down in our weariness and watch us in our helplessness, and in the morning we start again with new youth and new hope. This is thy way ; half day, half night is our life—half battle, half sleep. This is thy love, thou God of light. Thou dost recover us in sleep ; thou dost redeem our life by rest. Thou art always redeeming the children of men. We bless thee for all upward ways ; for all hills lifting themselves towards the blue sky—they are helps. To climb is to pray ; to ascend the mountain is to get away from the place of graves. Thou hast set the mystery of thy mercy

round about us, and within us and above us, and every place is the gate of heaven. We have come together to be blessed, to feel forgiven through the infinite love of the Son of God. We have brought our burdens, knowing that we shall not take them away again. We will try to sing thy praise, for thou art worthy to receive our adoration and our love for all thou hast done for us. We pray always for one another; we find words for each other's speechlessness; we pray in the language of our friends, and in their sighing we intercede. Give the old man to know that there is no old age, that life is one ascent into eternal youth. Let the beginner know that there are no endings in thy circle, and charm him with the confidence that in thy strength he will make his life a victory. Speak to the man bent on wrong courses; strike him down, not with lightning, but with light, so that though he be blind for a day or two, he may by-and-by receive his vision. Let the little ones be first remembered, for thou lovest them most of all. They are thy Church, though we know it not. We are still turning the children away, away from thy table because they do not understand it—as if a child did not understand it better than a grown man. Behold the little ones here and at home, and make them glad with purest joy, and hopeful because of thy presence and strength. As for those who are putrid—dead—thou art the Resurrection and the Life. O Christ! we must leave our dead at thy feet. We tried to save them and we failed—they would die. We leave them in thy hands. Comfort the poor sick ones who want to be with us to-day, but are bowed down by weakness. Bless every one who goes out to try to make the world better by teaching and proclaiming thy word, by offering prayer in ears unaccustomed to hear the sacred eloquence. And the Lord grant that at the eventide we may be stronger than in the morning, and that having fought the battle, we may be but the eagerer to renew the fray. Amen.

Acts xxvi. 1-32.

1. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself :
2. I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews :
3. Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews : wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.
4. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews ;
5. Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.
6. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers :

7. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?

9. I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

12. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13. At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15. And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet : for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ;

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision :

20. But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come :

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself ; much learning doth make thee mad.

25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely : for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest.

28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them :

31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

HERE is all that Christianity ever asked for : an opportunity to speak for itself. This is just what Christianity wants the Agrippa of all time to say : " Christianity, thou art permitted to speak for thyself." The answer of Christianity is the answer which must always be returned : " I beseech thee to hear me patiently." In that high courtesy the noble discourse begins. Christianity always appears in person, its witnesses are always at hand, the court is never disappointed, the judge has never to wait : Christianity is an incarnation ; not an argument in words, but logic in life. But Christianity must be heard patiently. Only the candid hearer can listen well. If we have put into our ears prejudices, foregone conclusions, obstinate convictions, through such impediments the music of Christianity cannot make its way. The mind must say, " For the time being I put myself at thy disposal ; write upon me what thou hast to write ; I will hear thee to the very end." That is the difficulty which we have to contend with. We are troubled by interruption. Who can sit still ? Though we do not loudly and audibly interrupt, we may interrupt silently and mentally. We should allow the word free course

through the mind, and, when it has completed its deliverance, then we may make reply. It seems so easy to listen ; and yet there is nothing more difficult. It may be questioned whether six men in any congregation ever do listen. To listen is a discipline. We hear the broad sounds, not the fine ones ; we pick out the great words—that is, words of bulk and great size—but not all the little beautiful jewels of speech that make up the wealth of the glorious exposition and appeal. Christianity simply wants to be heard—to be heard candidly, patiently, thoroughly ; and, when Christianity has ceased to ply us with her exposition and exhortation, she will be willing to return the courtesy and to hear what reply can be made. This is what Christianity cannot get—the opportunity of making itself heard. She has to speak in the crowd, to compete with the clatter of machinery, to make her voice penetrate through the rattle of wheels on hard pavements. The world that should make a theatre for her, and sit without breathing till the magical eloquence is done, listens with impatience, and therefore does not listen at all—interrupts vocally or mentally, and therefore spoils the wizardry ; and so the one speech that could and should convert the world, the world never hears. There should be but one sermon—one day with Christ should have converted the world if the world would have listened.

Here is the only answer which is universally available. The defence of Christianity stands precisely at this point to-day, in so far as it is effective. This is the only answer that ever made any converts. Other answers make defenders and controversialists and pedants ; this answer makes Christians and workers. But the world wants something larger—the world likes to be imposed upon by bulk. As Christian churches and Christian preachers, we ought to take our definite stand just here, and when Paul is done, we should say, one and all, “ That is our answer.”

Let us examine it.

It is personal testimony. Paul talks about nobody else but himself. He says, in effect, “ This happened to me ; had it occurred to some one beside, I might have mistaken the statement. I might have dropped some links of the chain, I might have misconceived the purpose of the speaker ; but this happened to me. If you contradict this statement, you contradict me ; you make me a false witness.” That throws new elements into any great

controversy, and Christianity alone can bear that application of the personal element. It swallows up all egotism. If we have nothing to say out of our own consciousness and experience, we cannot preach. He only can preach who can say, "I was struck with light and made blind; for three days I saw nothing, and then new sight was given to me." "If Christianity were a wrangle in words, I cannot tell who might arise to make new terms and to insist upon new definitions, but I stand," says the great Pauline preacher, "not upon ever-changing opinions, but upon indestructible instincts and indisputable facts." We are afraid to speak about ourselves; and, in truth, I am not surprised at the fear. We are so humble that we dare not speak about our experience; we think it ought to be something between ourselves and God. Paul never thought so; he began in the morning by saying, "By the grace of God, I am what I am"; and at night, when he put away the sword and the shield for the day, he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He was not so humble as we are; we rebuke him, we shame him.

Not only was this personal testimony, but it was an instance of personal conversion. Are you ashamed of that old word? Men used to be converted; now they change their opinion and their standpoint and their attitude. Mountebanks! In the old time souls were converted—turned right round—and of this heroic time Paul is the most illustrious instance and example. See where he began—"which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." That was the starting-point; what was the end? "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." That is what we mean by conversion. The definition is concrete and absolute. Paul was not a profligate to be touched by emotions, for a moment to cry over his sins and for another moment to affect contrition for them. Paul's was not a vacant mind, ready for any new impression, anxious to receive one, earnestly desirous for some new thought to come and take possession of the unfurnished brain. Paul was not a fanatic, fond of exciting adventures, as there may be amongst ourselves, persons who go the round of the sects, who make friends to-day and renounce them to-morrow, and rush with irrational enthusiasm into

new alliances on the third day. This is the kind of man he was : " my manner of life from my youth "—I go back to first days—" after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." He was stubborn, haughty, utterly convinced ; his mind was verily preoccupied. " I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them." That was the man at the first ; at the last what was that same man ? Ready to be offered, looking for the crown of righteousness which the Lord Christ, the righteous Judge, would give to him. That is what we mean by conversion—that is to say, turning right round and going straight away in the other direction. And if the Christian Church does not affect that kind of good, I know not that any other kind of good is really worth effecting, except as a means to an end. But with how bad a skill have we modified the word " conversion." We move now on a pivot ; we turn round and round and call it progress. If any one should ask us what we mean by conversion, we would point to the case of Paul.

Here is a conversion based upon a distinct history. Ours is not so romantic, but it is quite as real. This is our life. The incidents were individual and local, but all the significance is universal, both as to nature and as to place. Look at those incidents. Christianity meets men on wrong courses : Paul, then called Saul, was on his way to Damascus, intent upon doing a wrong thing. Are we not also on the wrong road with a wrong purpose, armed by the power of a wrong authority ? There is nothing so romantic in this as at first we may have supposed. So far, I have been with this very man ; I remember him, I remember his distended nostrils, his fire-lighted eye, the fierce blow of his fist ; I once touched him, I was once mistaken for him—a man on the wrong road. " All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way." Do not fasten your attention upon the word Damascus and say you were never there. Damascus in this history is a symbolical word, and stands for wrong courses, wrong purposes, wrong destinies. Christianity fights with the weapon of light : " I saw in the way a light from

heaven, above the brightness of the sun." I have seen that light ; this is my own experience. Where is the so-called romance ? I remember the moment of illumination ; my mind goes back to the point of intensity ; I exclaimed, " I see it now ! I see the hideous iniquity, I see the shameful ingratitude, I see the infinite love, I see the sacrificial Blood—yes, I see it ! " That is conversion. Christianity is the religion of light, the religion of mental illumination and mental explanation and mental liberation. Never did you find Christianity lead man from a great place into a little one, from a grand view to a circumscribed point. Christianity never made any man less than he was before. Christianity is the religion of evolution in respect of bringing men up to their higher selves, their nobler powers, their sublimer capacities. Man does not know what he is until he has been touched by the full meaning of the Cross of the Son of God.

Christianity entrusts with new missions. " Rise, and stand upon thy feet : for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister." Christianity does not perform in the mind the miracle of eviction, casting out of the mind all that was in it, without furnishing the mind with thoughts, convictions, and sublimities of its own. The reason why so many people have turned away from Christ is, that, though they have seen the light, they have not discharged the ministry—they were content with the vision ; they forgot the obedience. The grandest sermon may be forgotten ; the brightest vision from heaven may become but an impression gradually fading away upon the inattentive memory. We must keep up visions by services ; we must maintain theology by beneficence. We cannot live upon the sublime incidents of external life ; we can only persevere in grace by persevering in goodness. Are we certain that we have seen the light ? We cannot be certain unless we are quite sure that our last action in life was to do some good to mankind. Instead of sitting down and analysing feelings, frames, moods, sensations, and impressions, in order to find out whether we are really Christians or not, we should go out and call the blind and the halt and the poor, the maimed and the friendless to a daily feast, and in that act we should see how truly we are accepted of God. If Paul had retired as a gentleman of leisure, he might have forgotten the vision, or have contracted it into an anecdote ; but he made it the starting-

point of a new life, and in war, suffering, and agony, he got the confirmation of his best impressions. A working Church is a faithful Church ; an honest, earnest, self-sacrificing Church is always orthodox. This is the argument which can be translated into all languages, adapted to all intellectual capacities, and pressed upon all sorts of hearers, so as utterly to silence their objections. There is no reply to self-sacrifice for Christ's sake.

Christianity sustains by Divine inspirations. Paul said in the twenty-second verse, " Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue——" Conversion is followed by confirmation. The great point of illumination is sustained by continual gifts from heaven to the waiting and obedient heart. Paul did not eat bread once for all : he sat daily at the table of the Lord ; he obtained help of God. He needed it all ; every night he needed the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost to sustain him after the wearing fray. His life was oozing out of him, his nerves were shattered, his hopes were put to a greater distance ; the enemy seemed to be stronger than he was, so much so, that to-morrow he could not have gone out had he not obtained help of God. Ministers, that is how we must live ; we must obtain help from heaven ; then we shall be able to say, " Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," and out of the grave of the night must come the resurrection of the morning. Then shall we be to ourselves and to our friends a surprise of power, a revelation of the sustaining grace of God.

This is the answer of Christianity to ever-questioning Agrippa. Difficult argument there is none ; verbal refinement and curiosities there are none. There is experience, there is faithfulness to the facts of life, there is the assignment of a cause equal to the sublimest effect. We have wandered from these lines ; hence our loss and weakness. We ourselves have ceased to be the living logic, the incarnate argument. We now refer the inquiring Agrippa to the ponderous volume he has no heart to read, instead of pointing him to a life pure as light, undivided as love, unre-served in sacrifice.

XCIH.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always giving unto us a new hope. Thou art the God of hope ; thou art pointing us every day to the day that is yet to come—the bright day, the Sabbath day, the day without night. This hope have we in thy Son. He hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. So now our conversation is in heaven, our expectation is in the skies. We expect the Lord Jesus, who shall change our common body and make it like unto his own glorious body, according to the power whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. The power is one ; the power is infinite. All power, in heaven and on earth, was given unto him on the third day, and that power is the defence of his redeemed. We abide under the shadow of the Almighty ; we do not trust to our own weakness—it is a daily disappointment and humiliation—we trust to the Infinite Strength, the eternal Son of God—the One Priest, whose prayer is our intercession. We bless thee for every ray of light : it is always a kindly surprise ; the morning always exceeds our expectation and finds our imagining at fault. We cannot overtake the splendour of thy light ; we know not the fulness of thy glory. When we think we have seen it all, behold, a new gleam throws all other light into darkness, and we stand in the rapture of a glad amazement. Thou hast yet more light to break forth ; we have not seen the morning of which all other mornings are but types. We shall be satisfied, when we awake, with thy likeness. In the presence of that likeness, we shall need nor sun, nor moon, nor summer day, for thy countenance is its own noontide, and thy smile is our heaven. For all thy training of our life how can we bless thee ? We have not understood it ; sometimes we have appeared to resent it ; we did not know what thou wast doing with us. Thou didst cause us to be driven away into the wilderness, to be sold into far-off lands, to undergo captivities and humiliation ; thou didst strip us and rob us and beat us with great violence ; and we knew not that we needed it all to make us men. The chastening for the time being was not pleasant or joyous, but grievous ; but now, even in this little afterward, we begin to see somewhat of its gracious intent, and by-and-by, when the light is sufficient and our vision is enlarged and purified, we shall see thy purpose, we shall kiss thy rod, we shall bless thy chastisements. We pray thee for the great outlook, for the eyes that can see the unseen, for the great and Divine heart that knows without learning, that sees without locking—that secret, sympathetic power which knows and feels and rejoices by a law

which men have not yet put into words. Give us an unction from the Holy One, and we shall know all things, and know them not the less that we are wholly unable to explain them. We bless thee that our explanation runs short; we thank thee for fountains that have no equivalent vessels. We bless thee for these inner knowings—these charges of knowledge and of power which we cannot express in words, and have weighed in scales made by men. We know that we know. Our knowledge is an inspiration, our attainment is a gift of the Holy Ghost; we have communications from the skies. Enrich us with all needful knowledge in Christ Jesus, thy dear Son. May we grow in acquaintance with the purpose of his heart; may we burn with Christ; may we sometimes be almost unable to say what is the difference between him and ourselves because we are so absorbed in his love, so filled with his spirit, so desirous to obey his will. Comfort the weary; give joy to those who sit in desolation; bring back the sunny hope that has fled from the young heart for a little while; make our houses homes; in the grate may a fire burn that does not consume the dwelling, but which shall interpret to us, in a thousand agonies and beauties, the Great Fire—thy very Self—that warms the universe. As for our sin, thou hast answered it. We bring it to thee, for thou alone canst heal the leper-heart; with thee is all cleansing, thou dying, rising, triumphing, interceding Son of God. Amen.

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

Acts xxvi. 1-32.

(Continued.)

PAUL uses an expression which is full of significance in regard to all speakers:—“I think myself happy.” Now we shall hear him! You do not hear any man until he is happy. Speaking under constraint, you get a wrong idea and measure of the man, for he cannot do justice to himself, nor can he do justice to any great theme. Paul is happy: we shall therefore get his power at its very best; the audience fits him: he can fly in this firmament. Conditions have much to do with speech and with hearing. The man is not the same man under all conditions. We say about other things—and say truly—“Circumstances alter cases.” Paul seems to have liked a Roman hearing. There was something in the augustness and imperial grandeur of the circumstances that touched him and brought him up to his very best. Even before Felix he said he would the more cheerfully answer for himself because that bad procurator had been a judge for a longer period than others.

Before Agrippa he says, "I think myself happy." Now he will spread himself out; he will spare nothing; we shall hear all the music of his soul. It should mark a crisis in a life to hear Paul's defence. Why do we not make more red-letter days in our life? To read this defence sympathetically, to get into the swing and rhythm of this noble eloquence, should make us young again with hope and fearlessness and confident triumph, at the last, in Christ. Hearers make speakers: the pew makes the pulpit. Give any apostle an opportunity of feeling happy, and you will at once evoke from his soul music which would otherwise lie dumbly and hopelessly within him. We are to hear a happy speaker. The opportunity given to Paul is to speak for himself; how does he do it? By unfolding the Gospel. "But he was not asked to preach." But Paul cannot open his mouth without preaching—to speak is to preach, to breathe is to pray, to *be* is to plead for Christ. "But the audience, as to its judicial structure, is a Roman one." No matter; Paul makes known the riches of his Lord's grace. When Agrippa said unto Paul, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself," we expected that Paul would have defended himself according to Roman law. Paul makes no reference to Roman law. Paul always took the broad and vast view of things, and looking upon all life from the highest elevation, he saw it in its right proportion and colour and measure. He was never overwhelmed by details: he had the great religious art of putting things right back from him that he might look at them as they really were. These details leap upon us, clutch us, sting us, take away from us a large portion of our best strength. We have not that sovereign power, that sacred spiritual energy which can take hold of them and say to them, "Stand back, till I see what you really are in number, force, and value." Consider the opportunity and then consider the use made of it. Paul is all the while speaking about himself, and yet all the while he is preaching such a sermon as even he never preached before. He keeps to the point and yet takes a long tether; he never leaves the first personal attitude and relation, and yet all the while he is rebuilding all the Christian argument and reuttering in new tones and with new stretches of allusion and meaning the whole Gospel of salvation. This should be a lesson to all men. We may speak about ourselves and yet hide ourselves in the glory of Another.

We need not make our experience egotistic—even the use of the first personal pronoun need not imply any self-consciousness : it may be used without being abused. If we could have heard Paul say “ I,” we should have seen that it but helped him to hook himself on to the Christ in whose being his own was lost. There is a way in all things ; there is a manner self-explaining. The thing to be noticed is, that Paul never glories except in the Cross of Christ. Standing before kings, he never changes his theme. Happy in his opportunities, he is only happy because he can draw a fuller portraiture of the One Saviour of the world.

In the next place, observe Paul’s peculiar, but ever-available way of illustrating religious mysteries. Paul illustrated religious mysteries by relating personal miracles. Observe what a wonderful connection there is between the eighth verse and the ninth. Suddenly Paul breaks out with the inquiry, “ Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?” Then as suddenly he reverts to his own case : “ I verily thought with myself—” Observe the word “ thought” in both verses : first, “ Why should it be *thought* a thing incredible” ; and then, “ I verily *thought* with myself” —about myself—“ that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” What is the argument ? Evidently this : there are incredible things in theology, but there are also incredible things in personal history ; seeing that the incredible things in personal history occur every day—face us and challenge us at every turn of life ; seeing that we must accept them—why should it be thought a thing incredible that along theological lines there should be mysteries equally direct and equally stubborn as to apprehension and solution ? That is the key of true learning. Paraphrased, the case might stand thus : “ I know it is a marvellous thing that God should raise the dead, but God has raised me from the dead ; I was dead in trespasses and in sins, I was the captive of death—quite dead—and God raised me ; if, therefore, he has raised me—having worked a miracle of resurrection or regeneration in my heart—I can see how the same God could work the same miracle on another ground and under other circumstances.” Such is the way to lay hold upon religious mysteries and their sacred and infinite meaning. We must avail ourselves of personal analogies, experiences, and wonders wrought in our own heart and life.

God asks us to look within, that we may find the key to his kingdom. Where we have erred so much and lost so much is that we have been looking for the key in the wrong place. We ourselves are witnesses. There is not a miracle in all the Bible that has not been wrought, in some form of counterpart or type, in our own life. Paul got such a view of himself as to entitle him to set against outward religious mysteries the miracles which had been wrought in his own nature. You can steal my Christianity if it is only a theory ; you cannot break through nor steal if it is hidden in my heart as a personal and actual experience. There should be less discussion and more life ; there should be less challenge to the controversial foe and more beneficence, humbleness of mind, snow-white pureness of soul ; and with these you may strike the most audacious enemy dumb. If you come to consider the resurrection of the dead from a merely intellectual point of view, it cannot be explained. Everything that is merely intellectual is, more or less, either a difficulty in the way of the resurrection or a circumstance which renders it impossible. The resurrection of the dead does not come within the reason of the mind. I will therefore search my life, and I find that I myself, a Christian man, may say I have been raised from the dead. There is nothing more remarkable in the rising of the sheeted dead from the deep grave, than in my being what I now am as compared with what I once was. This is Paul's argument. He said, " When they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities—and now I count myself unhappy, except in their society. The God that did *that* can raise the dead. I am myself a miracle, and therefore, from the height of my own experience and in the bliss of my own consciousness, I can receive as an august article in my theological creed the article that God can raise the dead." Paul drives the inquiry home. " Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you ?"—you limit the Holy One of Israel ; you enlarge yourselves at the Divine expense ; you put things wholly out of right relation and colour ; in doubting the resurrection of the dead, you set up the idolatry of yourselves. We must not measure the Divine by the human, but the human by the Divine. Deepen your Christian experience,

enlarge and ennoble your intercourse with God in the secret places of the sanctuary ; draw to him more wrestingly and lovingly, and, rising from the altar where you have been lost to time and sense, you will see all things in a new light, and when objections and difficulties are put in your way you will be able to reply, " With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We deal with weak men when we deal with persons who have no answer in themselves. You may have lost your argument because you had to take down a book to prove it, and the book was not in the library when you wanted it. When shall we get rid of the notion that Christianity is to be defended by books? It is to be illustrated by them ; it is to be magnified, in some of its human aspects, by books ; but the defence of the Christian mystery must be in the Christian consciousness. In this great argument, grace is genius, experience is eloquence. So it is with all preaching and teaching : we do but recite a lesson unless we speak out of the deep, true experience of the renewed and sanctified heart and will.

Paul, having thus shown us his way of regarding religious mysteries, proceeds to reveal his method of testing heavenly visions. In the nineteenth verse Paul said, " Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." The argument is, that visions are to be tested by obeying them. Visions will break down in the obedience if they are only nightmares. You cannot keep a nightmare about you for a long time with any consent of the will, with any sympathy of the soul, or turn it to any high utility. Then Paul sets forth a very wonderful doctrine here—namely, that he was not irresistibly converted—driven against his will to certain conclusions ; scourged to the stake ; made to go. Even here he asserts the freedom of the will—the attribute that makes a man. Plainly, Paul consented to this : " I was not disobedient " ; in other words : " Whereupon I obeyed, I answered affirmatively, I gave my consent ; I consented to the vision as certainly as I once consented to the death of the Christians." The way, then, to test all visions is to take them into the life, and see how they will bear the agony of daily strain. I am content to have all theology tested by this one process. You say you believe in God ; what *use* have you made of him? You insult God by merely intellectually entertaining him. He says, " I must go

with you"—in the going he proves himself. "Where wilt thou go?" "Everywhere!" That is the proof. If your god will not submit to that test, he is but a Baal, on whom you cannot safely rely—a Baal who will shame you on Carmel, who, when he finds you a hundred strong, will let you cry to the empty heavens, and take no notice of your piteous appeal. The God of the Bible says, "I will go with you : now we will go to business ; now we will go out into the summer fields, and read the apocalypse of nature ; now we will suffer in the sick-chamber ; now we will go into the churchyard, and lay our dear dead down there ; now it is dark, you must sleep, and I will watch you." That is the God in whom I want to believe. His appeal is its own proof ; what he wants to do is the thing that proves his reality. So it is with all Christian doctrine. Take the Sermon upon the Mount : the way to test it is to obey it. Some of us have fallen short of that high mark. What we have done with the Sermon upon the Mount is this : we have analysed it, we have parsed its grammar, we have discussed its theories, we have marvelled at its liquid music, we have admired it, we have recited it, we have bound it in leather and in gold ;—having so treated it, any man can steal it from us. But if we were to obey it—make it part and parcel of the substance of our nature—if we were to regulate the step of our life by its solemn music, it would become so inwrought into the very fibre and tissue of our nature as to be inseparable from us ; we would live the wondrous speech, and be an epistle known and read of all men. You are troubled in your theology because you are disobedient in your heart. If you would only live your theology, you would put an end to all controversy. Prove prayer by praying ; prove the inspiration of the Scriptures by being inspired by their speech. Obedience, let us say again and again, is the true confirmation of vision and of knowledge ; and where the obedience brings joy, rest, hope, strength—where it lifts us up to a new stature, broadens us with a nobler expansion, attunes us to a Diviner music—we may be sure that the vision which originated it was a vision that shone from heaven.

Here is also Paul's way of proving his sanity : by being what the world calls mad. Festus had never heard such a speech before ; Festus was not as happy as Paul ; Festus was out of this high running. He "said with a loud voice"—quite startled out

of his cold Roman propriety—"Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Festus thought it was learning—that is, letter-learning, book knowledge, a marvellous upgathering and focalising of information and pieces of wonderful news. Festus did not know the meaning of the word inspiration—a word so much higher than information as the heaven is high above the earth. Festus, therefore, thought Paul was mad. So he was from the point of view occupied by Festus. Christianity is madness if materialism is true. If this world is all; if that distant, grey, mocking thing you call the horizon is the boundary; if the stars are mere glints of wandering fire that cannot be accounted for, and that are working out no purpose; if the heaven is an infinite emptiness; if the Cross of Christ is not the means of saving the world—then there can be no such madness as spiritual religion, Christian faith, and Christian hope. It is one of two things with us: we are either right, or we are—not merely wrong—mad; obviously and scandalously wrong, absurd, frantic, imposed upon, and impostors in relation to other people. I know that we have fallen into a tepid state; I am aware that we have lost our first love, and have taken up with some new philanthropising; but in the days that revealed Christianity, in the days that created the Church, no man—Festus, Felix, Agrippa—no man, however low or high, could look at the Christians without feeling that they were the great men of the world. They gave up everything: "they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." Poor fools! they might have dined at good tables, they might have drunk foaming wines, and they might have made quite a figure in many a social circle; but "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword." Then they were mad, or inspired!

XCIV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come into thy house to find rest unto our souls. There is no rest outside. The peace of heaven is within the sanctuary of God. Lord, that sanctuary is thy Son Jesus Christ—Blessed One, Man, Woman, Child; the wondrous Life, the mysterious Being, Alpha and Omega. We come by that door, for other entrance there is none. It is a wide door; Welcome is written upon it; it opens at a touch. Lord, give us an abundant entrance and a long time in the sacred house. Here we would leave our weariness, and here we would leave our sin. Is there not a River into which a man may plunge himself and there leave all the leprosy of his life? We bless thee for the quiet day with a light above the brightness of the sun, with a hush deeper than the calm of the earth—the sweet day, the day of rest and hope and light and youth; thine own day, made by thyself for thine own purpose. May it enter into our souls. May there be Sabbath in the heart, a great holy rest in the secret places of the life. May we enter into this mystery through the resurrection of our Lord, who rose again from the dead. He must visit them for a moment and leave them to return to the living, that the living and dead may both be one in him, the Resurrection and the Life. May our hearts know the meaning of resurrection—rising again from a death in trespasses and in sins, and standing up in the immortal strength of renewed and sanctified manhood. May this be our joy—an inward pleasure, a gladness that cannot express itself in words, but in raptures and ecstasies and unspeakable utterance of triumph. This joy have all thy saints. It is madness to the cold reason of the world; it is the wildness which earthly prudence cannot comprehend. We would be found in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, saying things we do not understand, declaring things that cannot be proved by words, but that need no proof because of the joyous consent of the willing and thankful heart. Show us the treasures of thy wisdom, grace, and righteousness, and tell our hearts that all thou hast they have—yea, unsearchable riches, an incorruptible inheritance. We bless thee for the green spaces of our life. We would, sometimes, they were larger; but they are of thine own making, and thou dost fix their four corners; the bounds of our habitation are fixed and appointed of God. But we love the green places, the verdant meadows, the blossoms that tell of spring, the singing birds that come with the gospel of summer. If thou dost drive us away from these places into rocks and deserts and caves of the earth, it is still well: the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; thou art preparing us for the greener heaven, the immortal

spring, the summer that cannot die. We lay hold upon this hope, feed upon it, hide it in our hearts, recur to it in the dark and cloudy time, and renew our confidence under its warm and tender light. Help us to do our work better than ever, with a more willing heart, with a more industrious hand, with a more hopeful spirit. Sometimes we feel that some parts of our work are not worthy of us; then do we begin to realise our true quality—yea, thou hast appointed us this drill and discipline, this weary work, that our patience may be perfected and that our confidence may be seriously tried. Help us to accept all work as from the Living God, and to do it as if eating and drinking the Holy Sacrament. Make our houses all that homes ought to be. May there be a fire in every room, light in every window, welcome on every door, rest on every couch; may the table be of thine own setting, and the appetite made keen by thyself; and thus in confidence—sacred, loving, growing—may our handful of days upon the earth be spent. Nurse the dear invalid; shake the pillow with thine own gentle hand, for we cannot make it soft enough for the weary head. Speak a word when our voices are choked with tears, and shed a light that can touch the eye-balls of the soul. Go after the prodigal thyself to-day, and bring him home at eventide. Then will we stir the fire and beat the drum and sound the trumpet and spread the feast, because in our house we have seen the Resurrection. Amen.

Acts xxvi. 16-18.

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee;

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY DEFINED.

THIS is the kind of ministry which Jesus Christ wishes to establish in the earth. I will stake everything upon it that is dear to Christian faith and hope. No other statement is needed; no explanation is possible. The only competent exposition of these words can be found in their repetition. Say them over and over again in every tone possible to the heart, and you will find the result a complete knowledge of Christ's meaning. I am prepared to maintain that this conception of the Christian ministry

proves the deity of Jesus Christ, for the reason that it is such a conception as never entered into the uninspired mind, and, in particular, never could have entered into a mind constituted as was the intellectual nature of Saul of Tarsus. Reading those three verses is like roaming in a vineyard on an autumn afternoon. This is the Lord's planting. Every syllable bursts out with new wine. If men would ask you what the Christian ministry aims at, point them to the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth verses. That is the answer. Let us note the particulars just as they occur, without inventing an order of our own.

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet.” Here is the typical manliness of the Christian ministry. A noble challenge this! We do not want crawling men, fawning, crouching, disabled men, but men who can stand up and show their stature and their force. The Christian minister, realising Jesus Christ's conception of the ministry, does not apologise for his existence, does not account for himself as one of the units of mankind, does not beg a corner on which to spend his dying life: he stands upon his feet, a man every whit—bold, courageous, well-defined; a figure, a force, a factor not to be ignored. A beautiful incidental instance this of the quality of the ministry. Jesus did not speak to Saul as he lay down in the dust, a smitten and blighted thing, crushed with a new burden of light: he would speak to him, as it were, on equal terms, face to face. He is the Man Christ Jesus. He will not send frightened things about his messages and errands—blind, blighted things that cannot tell their tale—he will have the man, the whole man, the man at his best. That is the call to-day: the call for standing men, upright, forceful men; they can always make their own way under the Divine inspiration. But what kind of manliness? Only the manliness which is made possible by Christ. He gives the power to rise. This is not a carnal manliness, a thing of the flesh, an invention of the sense, an attitude, a posture, but an inspiration. That is the vital difference. You cannot stand up alone. Your very standing is an acceptance of the law that rules the universe. You can do nothing of yourself. If a man suppose that when he stands up he is doing something of his own accord, he is therein foolish. At whose bidding do we stand? What right have we to stand? This is a holy attitude,

acquiring all its majesty from its humbleness—a mystery of posture, formed from within, shaped from the centre. “Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” The manliness, therefore, is a Divine creation. To stand without permission to stand is impertinence ; to stand in obedience to Divine injunction is humility. Here is power coming out of weakness. God can make men sit down, lie down, roll in the dust of the ground ; he can seal their eye-lids with light ; he can deafen their ears with thunder. It is out of such lying and blindness and deafness that the true strength comes. If we have not first been laid down by the Divine power, we cannot stand in the Divine strength. We must have a momentary fall. The day of weakness must never be forgotten ; the soul must say to itself, “Remember that noontide when you were overwhelmed, struck down, thundered upon from an infinite height ; and remember that the Power which struck you down bade you stand up ; the Voice was the same, the Power was identical, the experience was continuous and coherent.” He does not know what it is to see who does not know what it is to be blind. Vision becomes a commonplace to the man who has always seen ; but what must it be to have the eyes opened and to see the whole visible creation all at once ! It is through this experience that the ministry must come—must have its hours of lying flat down—light-struck, stunned, dazed, disabled ; able only at least to ask questions with the tone of fear and yet with the accent of suppressed or concealed expectation.

These words cannot be without meaning. The very command to “rise, and stand upon thy feet,” is a royal command. The old tone is not taken out of the Voice with which we were familiar in the days of his flesh. We know that tone, there is none like it—the rainbow tone that has in it every tint and flush of vocal colour ; the grand imperative that makes all language quake, “Rise, and stand upon thy feet.” He who has stood before Christ may well stand before kings. We get over all our nervousness when we are with the Lord ; having risen at his command and looked at him straight in his very eyes—eyes of judgment, eyes of love, wells of heaven—we cannot be intimidated by face of clay. You would have been fearless of men if you had been more fearful of God. Fear God, and have no other fear.

“For I have appeared unto thee to make thee a minister.” Then ministers are not man-made, they are not manufactures, they are not turned out by machinery. “I have appeared unto thee to make thee a minister.” This is our strength. Only Christ can make ministers. We have forgotten this; we have taken to a kind of minister-making ourselves—a species of ecclesiastical pottery. “I have appeared unto thee to make thee a minister.” He never makes other than ministers. We do not read, “I have appeared unto thee to make thee an equal, a master, a priest,” but “a minister,” which, being interpreted, signalises a servant, a slave. “This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” He chooses whom he will: “Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble; but things that are foolish, and things that are despised, yea”—mathematical mystery—“and things which are not”—nothings—“to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” There is no mistaking the ministers which Christ makes. There is a touch no other hand can give. We do not know where it began, or where it ends, or what it is. Who can define the aroma? Who can take off the bloom and put it back again? Who can clutch the light and hide it in his bosom? The seal of Christ is upon every minister of his own making—not always the kind of seal we like. Jesus Christ writes his autograph in a thousand ways—yea, as the chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand in number, and he may go forth in any one of them at his pleasure, so he hath chosen twenty thousand ministries, but each bears the signature and the touch Divine. I do not speak of ministers in the pulpit only, but all ministers, at home and in the market-place—ministers who do not speak their sermons, but live them. We are all ministers, if we have been with the Lord, struck down at his feet, raised by his voice, charged with his Spirit. Never can I lose an opportunity of resenting the mischievous lie that only a certain class of men are the ministers of Christ. We are all God’s ministers, Christ’s apostles—some in one way, some in another—a sweet lute, the brazen telling trumpet made to summon things from the horizon. We are all instruments, ministers, agencies, through whom God speaks and illustrates His living and redeeming Word. A most blessed thing indeed that Christ’s stamp is upon every agent he

sends out } His initials are burned into the character ; somewhere there is the indubitable sign—in one man in the intellect, in another in the tender heart ; here in the eloquence that fills the ear with delight, and there in the pleading, holy intercession that lifts the listening soul into the quietude of heaven. Do not misjudge the Divine call. It is an infinite variety ; it is not an invariable monotony.

“ A minister and a witness ”—of what ? Christ must not only find the minister, he must find the sermon. He never finds the one without the other ; so he makes the minister and he makes the text. “ A minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen.” Not “ those things which thou hast imagined ; ” not “ those things which thou hast invented ” ; but, emphatically, “ these things which thou hast seen ”—so that a man denying thy ministry must first deny thy character. That is the strong argument. We have seen it in other instances ; we see it again in this. To deny a sermon is to deny the man ; to question the argument wherein it is factual is to question the character. Wondrous ministry ! the soul continually upon oath, the voice forbidden to utter anything for the sake of uttering it, and charged to tell what the soul has already heard. We do not want an inventive ministry, an imaginative ministry, but a listening ministry and a truth-telling ministry, a pulpit that will only say over again, with exactitude and punctiliousness of recollection, what itself has heard. The man who preaches or teaches pledges his character, not his genius. No man could have imagined such a call, and especially no man like the Apostle Paul. He was so strong in mind, naturally so sagacious, so penetrating ; he was gifted with that lightning mind which instantly burns its way through all difficulties. You must, in estimating the value of this call for evidential purposes, keep steadily before your mind the kind of man that Paul was in other directions. You have now to deal with a strong-minded man, with a resolute will, with a highly-trained intelligence ; and a man so qualified and characterised tells us that he was called, not to stand upon a velvet knoll in an earthly paradise, to speak amid circumstances which are themselves luxuries, but called upon to lay down his life in attestation of the truth of the statement which he made. This never entered the human mind. Many a man might dream that he was called upon

to marry the king's daughter, to ride in the king's chariot, to divide the king's throne, to sun himself in the king's favour—dreams of that kind are not wanting in human history—but that a man should dream that he was called to make statements every one of which would be contradicted, every one of which would be turned into a penalty which would be inflicted upon himself, is the difficulty with which we have to grapple. If we were dealing with a superstitious mind, we might, to some extent, account even for that dream ; but you must take the Apostle Paul as you have found him in this history, day by day—a man whose acquaintance ought to make us proud, the shaking of whose hand should form an epoch in our history ; a man whose every look was a revelation, whose every tone was a gospel—he says, long after the event, that he was light-struck, thrown down, raised up by the Jesus who smote him, charged directly with a certain ministry, and that that ministry involved daily pain, cold, hunger, nakedness, desertion, certain cruel death. This never entered the human imagination.

But Jesus says, not only “of those things which thou hast seen,” but “of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.” There is a growing revelation ; there is an expanding firmament. Christianity has a future as well as a past. The vision will return, the vision will enlarge, the vision will illuminate itself with higher and intenser glories. Expect the vision ; wait for the additional revelation. It will not be anything new in the sense of unknown and unrelated, but new in the sense of development, progress from the thing already in the soul. Sometimes we say of a sermon, “How large a sermon from so small a text !” No text is small ; you make a mistake in the statement, but the mistake relates to the text. Who would say, looking upon Bashan shaded by a thousand oaks, “How great a forest from so small an acorn !” ? No acorn is small ; in every acorn there is enough to clothe all the mountains of the earth with umbrageous oaks—forests out of which navies might be cut and palaces might be built. There is nothing new in the oak ; everything was in the acorn. If the acorn could speak, it might say, “This is what you called a little thing ; this is my proper self ; I was wrapped up and condensed when you saw me, but this is what I meant—all this strength, pomp, colour ; all this was in me when you took me in your hand and rubbed my polished shell.” It is so when

Jesus comes to us—the same Jesus, the same grace, the same Spirit, but growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How beautifully the seventeenth verse is put in! a verse of some two lines standing between two long verses: “Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles.” “Delivering”—that is a suggestive word. Shall I be bound? Shall I be a prisoner? Shall I be in the clutch of evil men? Yes, that is the meaning of it; thou shalt be delivered from them. Every minister has his stormy career if he be a faithful minister. Sometimes a minister will tell you—as if he were preaching his own funeral sermon—that he never had a difference with any human creature. What an awful life to have lived! What a terrible epitaph! Hear the light saying, “I never had a battle with darkness!” He could not tell so huge a lie. The life of light is a battle; it lives by fighting; it says to darkness, “Thou art my enemy—stand back!” The true minister cannot have a peaceful and luxurious life. I do not know who wants him; I know many who would be glad to get rid of him. Who wants the minister in his proper capacity? Not the makers of ill-gotten gain; they cannot bear the sight of the fellow. He has a gold test, and that they cannot tolerate. Says he, “This sovereign you wrung out of hands that could ill spare it.” “O my God!” says the man who is being tested, “if all my tens of thousands of sovereigns have to be tested in that way!—I cannot bear it!” “This is the exorbitant rent you forced out of the poor creatures who had to starve themselves to pay it.” “Cease!” “This was taken in the dark.” “Go!” Ay, who would be a minister? who dare to be a minister? There are thousands of preachers; there are few ministers. Who wants a minister of Christ? I don’t know. Not profane men, not worldly men, not self-idolaters, not men who have curtained themselves with secrecy and do not want to be disturbed; not men whose books have never been audited by pure sunlight. Who wants the minister in his distinctive and inspired capacity? Many want him as a companion, a man as well-read as themselves, exchanging the pleasant word with a religious accent; who wants him as a judge, a critic, a divider, a representative of the throne of God? Let any minister try that course, and he will soon see that it is impossible to be popular.

XCV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let light fill our minds, and let love excite and ennoble our emotions. Thy gospel is light. Jesus Christ, thy Son, is the Light of the world. In him, as in thy self, is no darkness at all. The darkness fleeth at his approach. He is the Child of the day, the Glory of the summer, the Lustre that fills all space. Yea, heaven itself shall have no need of the sun, because the glory of the Lamb will be the light thereof. Thou hast, in thy Son, Christ Jesus, turned us from darkness unto light. Our eyes are now open ; we see somewhat of the reality of things. Once we were blind ; now we see. A Man that is called Jesus anointed our eyes, and we do see. We owe all our knowledge to thy Son ; we owe our liberty to the Cross of Christ. The Son has made us free ; therefore are we free indeed. This is a glorious liberty ; it is our heaven begun below ; it is the liberty of large, keen, clear sight. We are not deceived by shape and figures now—by bulk and nearness : we see the things that are not seen ; we are living in the invisible ; we are on the earth, yet in heaven ; and we bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the question of the dying hour. This is our inheritance among them that are sanctified ; this is our sonship by adoption ; herein is the great grace of God abounding over sin, opening up a way into a blissful and pure eternity, and giving us to glory in tribulation also. The night is far spent ; the day is at hand—glorious day ! cloudless day ! the reign of light, the sovereignty of pure splendour. This is the realisation of faith ; this is the fruition of hope. For all religious uplifting of the soul we bless thee ; for all the emotion that cleanses the heart we thank God ; for the tears that come into our eyes and take out of them all earthly sights we bless thee as for great gifts. May we, having enjoyed the Christian feeling, go forward to do the Christian work, and thus confirm in action what we have enjoyed in fellowship. Show us what our duty is. Point us to the plough thou dost intend each of us to use. May there be no shrinking from the appointed labour ; with a true heart, a responsive love, a soul all trust, may we answer the call of God. Thou dost appoint our habitation, thou dost fix our business, thou dost cut our bread for us, and say, “ It is enough,” and thus rebuke the voracity that would destroy what it professes to nourish. Thou knowest how many coats apiece we need, and how many staves and swords, and how much of purse and scrip. May we take our whole life role from God, and have no will or wish or thought but to love the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with perfect love. Great peace

have they who love thee ; inner and eternal joy, not to be touched by thievish hand, have they who live in Christ, who move and have their being in the Son of God. This is heaven ! this is immortality ! We have what we ask for ; we are where we wish to be. Regard us as having many needs, all of which are nothing in the presence of the fulness of thy river. May we not look to our necessity, but to the fulness of God. Carry away our sins by a way thou hast thyself appointed, full of mystery, full of grace. Bring us every night to the Cross ; remind us every day of thy love. When the spirit of duty calls us to sacrifice, may the spirit of grace call us to triumph. Bless all old travellers and all young pilgrims ; all lookings back upon battlefields and roads well worn, and all dreamy forecasts of the future, shapeless and unknown. Be the Physician of the sick. Speak to the disappointed man who holds a blighted life in his hand, and tell him that this is not the end, yea, hardly the beginning, and may he take heart again. Be with those whose way lies through the grave-land, who are more in the cemetery than out of it, who are skilled in digging graves, yet get not accustomed to the wearing sorrow. The Lord himself stand by them ; breathe messages of peace into their hearts, and speak those great words never invented by the makers of human speech. The Lord have us, every one, like an only child, in his own keeping ; the Lord point out the road, fix the rate of travel, make us lodge where he pleases—in the palace, or in the open air, or under a sheltering tree—a stone a pillow ; where thou wilt and as thou wilt, only may our eye be fixed upon the star which leads to the Infinite Light. Hear us, every one—for ourselves, our loved ones ; for the present, for the absent ; for those whose life is needful to us, and for whose love we vainly pine. Good Lord, thou wilt enlarge thyself, rather than there should be no room for even one of the least of the countless host.

Hear our prayer at the Cross, made powerful by the intercession of the Priest, and whilst we say, Amen, let thine answer be hidden in our hearts. Amen.

Acts xxvi. 18.

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

VITAL MINISTRY.

WORDS fail to express my personal appreciation of this magnificent charge. This is the New Testament. Everything is in the eighteenth verse. No man ever invented that verse : it is a house not made with hands. I pause before it as before an object of infinite sublimity. Should any one ask,

“What does Christianity want to do in the world?” point the inquirer to the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts, and the eighteenth verse. That is our answer. We do not attempt to amend it; we accept it just as it stands there. We take no banner out on which we do not write these words in light. Would God we could enter into the spirit of this charge! It is not in the heart of man to invent that verse as an imposition. This is the centre of reason, the centre of health, the seal of God. Sometimes we want a concise expression—an easily quotable explanation of what we are and what we want to do. You cannot find any words so full, so bright, so tender, as you find in Acts xxvi. 18. Write them at the head of every sermon; write them in gold, brightened with diamonds, around every pulpit. This is what our Lord Christ wants to do. Is it worth doing? Would the world be the better for the doing of it? Is it worth my while—your while—to take up this programme? Let us examine it in detail, and then we shall know the fulness and the value of the Divine reply.

Picture the scene. A strong man is thrown down—a man capable of all but inveterate prejudice, invincible in will, cultivated in mind; a man of rare intellectual penetration and great moral sternness. Bidden to stand up, he receives a charge from an invisible speaker. I will not stop at the mystery of the invisibleness until I have mastered the moral purpose of the words that were spoken. We may spend so much time over the invisibleness as to overlook or neglect the beneficence. Let us stand at the point best fitted to our reason and our whole faculty, and then advance into the transcendental and the infinite. What does the invisible speaker want this man to do? To go to the Gentiles, the heathen peoples of the world. What does he want this man to do when he reaches the far-off lands? Everything depends upon this revelation. First, “to open their eyes.” My confidence is already turned towards this speaker. He is not the inventor of a superstition. Any religion that proposes to open our eyes is presumptively a true religion. Superstition says, “Keep your eyes closed; put a hood over your reason; do not make any inquiries; take my report of everything, and be contented and satisfied with it.” That is superstition. Christianity says to every man, “Stand up, I will open thine eyes; thou shalt see the bigness of the universe, the reality of things, the magnifi-

cence of life, the solemnity of destiny. Stand up, I will make a luminous man of you ; thou shalt have sight—faculty of criticism ; thou shalt have a large estate, a glorious appeal to the eye.” Christianity, then, does not seek to befool me ; Christianity does not want to envelop me in darkness, to shut me up in some prison,—priest-guarded, priest-locked, roofed in with superstition, wound round with darkness. Verily not. There are no blind Christians. In proportion as they are blind, they have not received the benefit of Christ. The Christian is a wide-awake man—all reason, all life. If any had supposed him to be a dotard, a superstitious fanatic, they have misunderstood the faith, if they have not misinterpreted the man. A rationalist ? That is what I am ! If any man outside Christ’s great revelation propose to be a rationalist, I call him a false man—a thief. He has stolen a livery that does not belong to his court ; he wears a crest he has purloined. I claim that Christianity is rationalism because it opens the eyes. Marvellous is that expression ! Do not suppose you understand it in a moment. It has in it a whole firmament of light and possibility, education, growth, development. This is a daily process in our education—namely : seeing things more clearly, with a happier and more satisfactory distinctness, noting their relations, proportions, interdependences, and final issues. Christ has no blind followers. If any man want to follow Christ, he must first have his eyes opened. That was Christ’s way in the days of his flesh. He did not say to blind men by the wayside, “ Grope your way after me, and we may see about your vision by-and-by.” No ; he stopped, gave eyes to the blind, and then passed on. Christians are not blind men, but men whose eyes have been divinely opened. Is it worth my while giving up what strength I may have, or faculty, to open men’s eyes ? Why, there is no mission so sublime ! It is almost like creating a man to give him sight. The man blesses you with a grateful, overflowing heart ; he says he owes the universe to you, as the instrument of God : for before it was a great night, now it is a sun-lit, glowing day. The greatest gift of man to man is the gift of idea, thought, new vision, the enlargement of the critical, judicial, and appreciative faculty. To open the eyes is to give wealth. The poet cannot give me the acres of my lord, but he can give me the landscape that belongs to the poorest of the children of men.

“To turn them from darkness to light.” That is upon the same line of thinking? Precisely: that is the Divine logic. Not to open their eyes to see the darkness as sevenfold greater than they dreamed it to be, but “to turn them from darkness to light.” What superstitious religion ever proposed to increase the day? One wonders that men, hearing this to be Christ’s purpose, do not stand up and say, “King of kings! Lord of lords!” They will follow any demagogue who will delude and befool them, and turn their back upon the man who wants to lead them out of darkness into light. This is the proof of the Divinity of the Christian religion. It is the religion of light; it cries, “Light! more light! cleanse the whole firmament of clouds and let all the light of God shine without interception.” What a turning is this from darkness to light! The phrase may go for less than its value because of its very simplicity. The white diamond does not attract the untrained attention so much as some muddily-coloured stone quite valueless: the diamond is neglected because of the very quality which gives it value. Is there a religion in this world that even proposes to turn men from darkness to light? I accept that religion at once on that very profession. Who can measure the distance from darkness to light? This is one of the immeasurable distances finding its counterpart in the expression, “as far as the east is from the west.” These are terms that transcend arithmetic. The writers would have borrowed arithmetical numbers to express their ideas but that arithmetical numbers have no relation to such stupendous distances. Darkness imprisons, darkness brings fear, darkness enfeebles, darkness contracts the mind. Jesus never said, “Take away the light; or if you light a candle, put it under a bushel.” Contrariwise, he said, “I am the Light of the world,” and “ye, my disciples, are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Because Christianity fights the darkness, loves the light, calls for midday, I accept it as the fullest and strongest philosophy of life yet made known to me.

There is another turning—namely: “from the power of Satan unto God.” Christianity is the upward movement of the world. “Nearer God!” is the watch-cry; “Away from the enemy; further from the destroyer; upward, out of his reach”—that is

the sublime charge, that the Divine inspiration. We know what is meant by "the power of Satan"—the power that victimises us, that dupes us, that gives us promises which end ever in disappointments; the power that unmans us, takes away our crown, breaks upon our self-control, mocks our prayers, and points us to the grave as the sad end. We know that power. It never gave us any education, it never took us to school; it never offered us any new book written by genius and inspired by purity. It always said, "Avoid school, keep out of the library; turn your back upon the Church, never mind the preacher; feed yourself: drink where you can, eat what you can get hold of; obey me, and I will give you the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"—a figure as large as the lie.

So far this is in some sense negative: "To open their eyes, turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Now we come to what may be termed a blessing more positive: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins." No man ever invented that! Man has invented forgetfulness of sins; man has brewed certain drinks which he will give to himself in order to dull the recollection of his iniquities. But this is dew from heaven; no fingers ever moulded these translucent drops of celestial purity. Christianity makes the greatest of all offers. It will not lull me, it will not administer opiate or narcotic to me: it will fight the battle right out; it will adapt means to ends; it will bring the eternal to bear upon the temporary, the Divine upon the human, the sacrificial blood upon the human sin; and the end shall be "forgiveness." Sweet word!—infinite in its depth of meaning, infinite in its height of promise. An incredible word! That is its difficulty with me: I know my sin so well that I know it cannot be forgiven—I am speaking now within the bounds and observation and consciousness of a personal and social kind. You can throw flowers upon it; you can employ men to come with instruments of iron and throw clay and sand and rocks upon it; you can bring all the great seas of the globe and pour their infinite floods upon it; but you cannot forgive it. Christianity says to me, in this mood of dejection and despair, "You can be forgiven, and I have come to tell you how." I am touched by the sublimity of the offer. If it were possible, I would accept it; but to accept it would be to contradict all my own consciousness and all

my own observation, and all the efforts of every empiric who has come to practise his nostrums upon me. Christianity replies : " I am well aware of that ; this will be no compromise ; my action is building upon original foundations : the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." My reply to that speech is a great flood of tears ; I say, " Would God that were true, thou sweet angel !" and I look suspiciously at the radiant mother-preacher. Can it be ? What is it that cleanses from all sin ? " The blood of Jesus Christ." I want that to be true ! O angel, radiant one—making the snow ashamed of its imperfect whiteness by the lustre of thy purity—I would thou couldst make me feel the Gospel thou hast made me hear !

Is it worth our while trying to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins ? In this faith I would serve and count all other programmes mean as lies. Then will come the " inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me"—new character, new brotherhood, new riches. This is what Christianity wants to do. Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel ! When this work is done, earth will be heaven.

XCVI.

P R A Y E R .

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast given welcomes unto the children of men, and we now respond to the welcome of thy love and sit down at the feast spread by thine own hands, and we desire to eat and drink abundantly according to the terms of thy bidding. The light is thine—the immeasurable glory of the day ; the infinite light, chasing all darkness, driving it away like an enemy—and in that light we see the symbol of thy love, so great, so glorious, so impartial, so free. Behold, thy love is high as heaven : who can reach it ? wider than the earth : who can lay his measuring lines upon it ? Thy mercy endureth for ever. These words fill our little life ; they overflow the necessity which we thought to be so great, and by their abundance they make our want seem so small. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound ; and where hunger pinches thou dost multiply the bread of heaven. Thou art kind to the unthankful and to the evil. This is the miracle of thine heart. We have seen the miracle of thine hands, and it is great beyond all imagining ; but the miracle of thine heart is the eternal wonder, the amazement of angels, the astonishment of men. Thou hast spared our life as if thou didst take pleasure in it. Surely thou understandest us better than we understand ourselves. Even our sin does not cut us off from thy presence, until a long time. Thou dost see through our sin ; thou dost say : “ The sinner is greater than his sin, and must, if possible—even at the cost of blood—be saved.” We are thy workmanship : the prints of thy finger are upon us : we are not our own. When thou dost fill our minds with these thoughts, we begin to see the meaning of the Cross, to hear the appeal of the sacrificial blood, and to behold the opening of heaven’s door to grant admission to wandering, but now penitent and contrite, souls. Show us revelations this day. Come from behind the cloud, and let one beam of thy glory fall upon our life ; and though it may blind us, yet shall we stand upon our feet at thy bidding and hear thy holy charge. We do not bring into thy courts clean hands, for we do not bring clean hearts. Create within us a clean heart, O God, and renew within us a right spirit. Let every soul in thy presence feel that he is looking upon his Father’s face. May the enemy lose all his power to-day. May our souls have open access to the throne of God, through the way of the Cross. Fill our minds with light and our hearts with grace, and inspire our will with the spirit of obedience, and let great blessing rest upon us all. Guard the old and the young, the busy and the suffering, the prosperous and the desolate ; and

send messages from thy house and a portion of meat in due season. Speak comfortably to those who are unknown, neglected, misunderstood. Help the struggling man to wrestle more bravely with all evil, and may he at last throw it, and, in thy strength, destroy it. Bless the stranger within our gates—the man who hardly understands our language, but is at one with us in our sentiment and purpose; the friend from distant shores; the loved one come to take our pledge and see how we fare; the child from school—every one. Let the blessing of the Lord fall upon each as upon an only child; and let there be rapture because there is forgiveness.

Now we wait the beam from heaven, the Voice from the cloud, the shining of the Eternal Father. Then shall the house be too small for us; then shall the walls stand back upon the gleaming horizon, and the lower roof lift itself to the heavens, and our life shall be one grand liberty. Amen.

Acts xxvi. 15-18.

15. I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee;

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

CHRISTIANITY SELF-ATTESTED.

IF you had a writing given to you copied and asserted to be a speech made long ago by your father, what would you do with it if you were desirous to ascertain its authenticity? The first reading of it would settle your mind. Knowing your father—his sentiments, his mode of expression, the peculiarity of style which made the speech what it was—you would be able to say instantly whether the speech was authentic or fabricated. We ought by this time to know enough of Jesus Christ's manner to be able to say whether any speech purporting to have been delivered by him was actually ever spoken by his lips. His style cannot be counterfeited; it will break down at some point, will any attempt to reproduce that inimitable eloquence. The words

may be well chosen, the simulation may be quite a work of genius ; but there will be something wanting—an accent, a touch, a breathing peculiarly his own. It is intensely interesting to have handed to us what purports to have been a speech made by Jesus Christ after his ascension. Here is a speech reported by a man who never saw Jesus Christ in the flesh, or communed with him, or was received into his fellowship. Had Saul been a daily attendant upon the ministry of Jesus Christ, he might, to some extent, have imitated his style with considerable skill ; but even that circumstance was wanting in this case. We shall see what change death has made upon our Master, and resurrection and coronation. Is this the Jesus whom we have known so well ? I think it can be shown that we have in this little speech a recapitulation of the four Gospels. On this speech might be founded a powerful argument for the inspiration of the Christian Scriptures. This is the New Testament in miniature ; this is a condensed form of the Gospel revelation. If Paul is right here, he may be right in other places. He cannot be allowed to pass off this speech flip-pantly or incidentally : we will detain him here and cross-examine him, and turn over his witness page by page and examine it line by line, and if he is strong at this point, it will be so much in his favour.

What says Jesus Christ ? “ I have appeared unto thee for this purpose.” Here I recall the words which made the first ministers : “ Follow me.” None was with him ; no presence was allowed to turn that singular into a plural. He is as personal as ever, as unaccompanied as before ; as grand in solitude, as majestic in completeness.

“ I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make——” Here I remember the charming word, “ I will make you fishers of men.” The word is the same : Jesus Christ is still Maker, Creator. That word, O Saul of Tarsus ! was well chosen, that word “ make.” It is a king's word ; it is a Divine term. It goes back to origins and sources, to beginnings and springs ; there is a marvellous original power in it. The speaker does not propose to modify, adapt, add to, rearrange : “ I will make,” I will create. So far I can identify the Master in the quotation of the servant.

“ To make thee a minister ”—that is a new word—“ and a

witness"—that is an old word. "Ye are," said Jesus Christ, "witnesses of these things."

Proceed still further: "a witness both of these things which thou hast seen." Why, that is the old method; that is exactly the answer which he returned to the inquiring Baptist: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see." We speak as eye-witnesses; we are not quoters from authors of an ancient date, we are witnesses of "things which we have seen." This is the power of Gospel speech. It is an incarnation: a man who speaks affirms in his own name and in his own person; he is a witness of things which he himself has seen.

Proceed further: "and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." That opens a wide field of possible revelation. So it does. That is exactly what Jesus Christ did in the days of his flesh. Said he to his disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Jesus Christ did not put down a full stop, saying, "This is the end." There is no end to the meaning of revelation. There is no end to the literature of the alphabet. The letters are but six-and-twenty in number, and no man attempts to add another letter to the alphabet; but into how many forms, through how many permutations, may these letters be thrown or passed! It is the same with the New Testament: the alphabet is here, the beginning of Christian thought, life, purpose, power; who can tell into what phases this alphabetic symbol may be passed? Observe, nothing is added to the revelation; there is no invention of a merely human kind admitted into this great outlook. However large the book, it is all in the alphabet; however magnificent the unfoldment of the truth by human eloquence, the truth itself is the distinct and direct gift of God alone.

Proceed now to the seventeenth verse: "Delivering them from the people, and from the Gentiles." Surely that is new. What occasion is there to deliver a preacher "from the people, and from the Gentiles"? Here is the Lord's own speech: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before gov-

errors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. . . . Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Truly this seventeenth verse was spoken in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. It is a marvellous thing if this was invented. It is impossible, considering Saul's antecedents and Saul's religious prejudices, that he could have invented a speech so perfect, not only in the letter—which might have been a mere trick of eloquence—but so spiritual in the penetration and sympathy. So far, I see it every whit as a reproduction of the matter and manner with which long study has made us so familiar.

The eighteenth verse is a summary of all that Jesus began both to do and to say. The miracles and the Gospels are all in this eighteenth verse. For example: "To open their eyes." That is what Jesus Christ was always doing. He could never be at rest in the presence of the blind; instantaneously he felt the near presence of the blind man. When did he ever leave the blind man in darkness? Again and again he said, "According to your faith be it unto you." He opened the eyes of one that was born blind; he opened the eyes of the blind beggar who called to him from the wayside. Jesus Christ will not have any blind followers. This reference, of course, is not to the opening of the physical eyes, but to the opening of the mental vision. Still it is in exquisite harmony with the whole purpose and method of the Saviour: he will give light, more light; in him is no darkness at all, and from us he will drive away every cloud and shadow.

"To turn them from darkness to light." When did he ever turn men from light to darkness? Never. Whenever he visited a town, the inhabitants were startled by an access of intellectual lustre; sometimes they were dazzled, sometimes distressed—they were always surprised. Things appeared so much larger to them after he had touched them; old thoughts stood up in new meanings when he breathed them; the law itself became a kind of gospel when he repronounced its awful words. Enlargement is a characteristic of the incoming of Christ.

"And from the power of Satan unto God." When did he ever reverse that process? He came to bruise the head of the serpent; he came to destroy him who had the power of death. He was

the continual enemy of the devil : his first battle was with the devil in the wilderness, and his last battle was with the devil on the Cross. He would turn men to God, give them new ideas concerning the origin of things. He would ennoble all thought, enlarge all life, glorify all destiny by associating the whole with the name and sovereignty of the Living God.

Go further, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins." That is his very word : "Son, daughter, thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee" ; "Forgive us our trespasses" ; "Father, forgive them." That is not the kind of word which a bad man would be likely to invent ; bad men have not such holy dreams. "Forgiveness of sins" is a phrase which never occurred in the nightmare of wickedness and imposition. Some fruits can only grow in certain climates ; they cannot grow elsewhere ; they seem to say, "We belong to this land, and to this land alone ; men have attempted to rear us in other places, but we could not live there : it was not our native-clime." It is the same with some doctrines. You cannot develop the doctrine of forgiveness of sins in a heart that is sinful through and through—so sinful as to invent a religion that is itself a lie. We seem to hear the Saviour himself at this point. Who ever said "forgive" in his tone ? Surely this is none other than the speech of the Son of God !

But how was this forgiveness to be accomplished ? and how was it to be followed ? By "inheritance among them which are sanctified." The whole process is set down to the action of "faith." Have we ever heard that word before ? Did we ever hear it really until Jesus Christ spoke it ? Does the word "faith" ever occur in the Old Testament in the sense of a religious and spiritual exercise with a view to spiritual results and blessing ? Jesus Christ is the maker of this word in its Gospel uses ; faith is a fruit only to be plucked in the Gospel garden ; that word is his. Surely we know it. Said he, "According to your faith be it unto you" ; "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed" ; "How is it that ye have no faith ?" "O ye of little faith !" "Believe ye that I am able to do this ?" Why, the word "faith" is the key-word of Christ's ministry and doctrine. It is the last of the senses, it is the sixth sense—all the others gathered up into one power and glorified.

So far the speech is self-proving. I find in it no syllable or tone that is not in vital accord with everything we have read in the Gospels ever spoken or done by the Son of God. This is a field of evidence to which I would invite every student of the Scriptures. Read the Book carefully through with a view to see how far its parts are confirmed by one another, and how far even apparent discrepancies admit of a kind of reconciliation which adds infinite force to the substantial argument for the unity of the Scriptures. Perhaps a more vivid instance of confirmation could hardly be produced than the one which is now before us. Paul is supposed to be in a fanatical state of mind : he is struck down to the ground, blinded, disabled ; he is supposedly the victim of an hallucination of the most complete kind ; yet when he himself reports what happened to him, no slip or flaw can be found in his evidence which throws the slightest doubt upon the identity of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the accepted Gospels. Thus, every examination of Scripture, part with part, wholly, gives us a more sure word of prophecy. More than that, everything is here which is needed. Let invention do something ; make room for fertile genius ; now come and amend, enlarge, complete this statement. Take this as a programme for the revolution, regeneration, and perfecting of the world, and add to it one line that is not involved in its unfathomable wisdom. It cannot be done. Not a single line was changed, comparing the commission given to the original apostles and the commission now entrusted to Saul. Jesus Christ is in this, as in other respects, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The Gospel never changes. No new terms have been invented ; no original doctrine has been conceived since the ascension of the Prince of Life ; the foundation is the same tried, precious, elect Corner-stone. No new instrument was proposed—the instrument is still “ faith that is in me.” “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “ Whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” Education has advanced, civilisation has proceeded, the fellowship of nations has increased in intimacy and in trustfulness ; but faith remains the same, and is being proved, alike by civilisation and by religion, to be the only thing that can touch the highest life and unite the grandest interests of man. Faith is a word with grace. Faith is itself a mustard-seed term—small at the first, yea, almost

insignificant—but as the ages multiply in number and increase their energy and their influence, the word “faith” grows along with them, calls them to higher effort, to nobler endeavour, to larger sacrifice. It is a word which vindicates itself as the necessities of men develop and the powers of men rise towards the completeness of perfection.

I am glad to have had this speech submitted to me. It is the speech of Jesus Christ ; it is full of the spirit of Jesus Christ ; it recapitulates with burning condensation all that Christ ever said. Give me those three verses, and you give me the whole New Testament.

XCVII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, the morning is thine. It is full of light and hope ; it is the seal of thy presence ; it is the smile of thy love. Thou delightest in light : God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Thou hast called us, in Christ Jesus, to be children of the light and of the day ; and to walk in paths that are lighted up with heaven's glory ; and to let our light shine before men, and draw them to the Father of lights. May we answer this Divine appeal with all the haste of love, with all the ardour of earnestness. Then shall our life be an open vision, and we shall see the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. We bless thee for all cheering words, for all tender encouragements, for every Gospel that can break the door and give liberty to the captive soul. These ministries we have in thy Son. He is our Saviour, our All in All ; Beginning and Ending ; Inexplicable, unmeasurable, Infinite. We rest in Christ : we are calm in his tranquillity ; we are mighty in his power ; he is our one Defence ; he is our blessed Lord. We thank thee that he has opened heaven. We now see it ; even now we overhear its music ; yea, more, by high faith, by unquestioning and undivided love, we are already in the city of God. Thou hast caused us to triumph in all places in the power of the Cross of Christ ; so, even now, there is no more sorrow, nor pain, nor death. These things are but in the letter, they are incidents to be encountered and passed ; but their bitterness is gone and their triumph is impossible. This is the joy of thy people,—blood-washed, baptized with fire ; having undergone all the mystery of the new birth and become adopted into the family of God ; invested with eternal privileges and enriched with unsearchable riches. We do not always seize the inheritance. We own before thee that our rapture fails us ; the flesh for the moment triumphs, and there is no strength left in the soul whose hymns and psalms have been forgotten. But this is momentary ; we come to ourselves again by quick inspirations from on high ; we are lifted up into nobler manhood, and we triumph again and again in the Lord of all victories, whose battles can end but in one way. May we live often in this spirit ; and if we must needs be bowed down because of the cloudiness of time and the weakness of the flesh, yet give us periods of renewed youth, great Sabbatic spaces in the life, in which we shall be more in heaven than on earth ; and by the frequent coming again of such seasons of liberty and light, we shall know that we are not forgotten in heaven. Thou knowest us altogether—our darkness and burden, our sin and

shame, our selfishness and worldliness, our want of enthusiasm, our distrust of the very God whose name we breathe. Thou knowest, too, our penitence—the tears of our heart, the contrition of our souls, the utter brokenness and self-renunciation of our will. Pity us ; bind us up again ; cleanse us from all sin—yea, with thine own hands wash us in the fountain of cleansing. We pray for one another always—it is the heart's best gift. We pray for the blind, that they may see ; for the perplexed, that the right road may be chosen out of the many converging paths ; for the heavy-laden, that if they may not have less burden, they may have more strength. We pray for the coming generation, that they may be better than we have been—manlier, greater, truer ; that they may see Christ's revelation more broadly and answer it with a completer loyalty. We pray for the sick, that they may forget their sickness in their approaching immortality. We pray for the traveller in the far-off land, for the voyager on the troubled deep, for all men far away from home and kindred and known speech and custom. We pray for all mankind—the black and the white, the barbarous and the civilised ; the great king and the poorest serf. “ The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.” We cannot understand this mystery, but we can commit it and commit ourselves to the keeping of the only wise God, redeeming all men with blood and sending upon all men an impartial light. Thou wilt explain thyself in due time. We are impatient because we are weak ; we are in haste because our wisdom is imperfect. Would God we might in Christ, the Son, the Priest, rest quietly and hope confidently in God ! Amen.

Acts xxvii. 1-20.

1. And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia ; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

3. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

4. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

5. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

6. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy ; and he put us therein.

7. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone ;

8. And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens ; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

9. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them.

10. And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

11. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

12. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter ; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and north-west.

13. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

16. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat :

17. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship ; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship ;

19. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DELAY.

THE ship is a prison. The list of prisoners is not a long one : " Paul and certain other prisoners." When was Paul ever hidden in the crowd—tailed off in the dim distance ? He is still the chief figure ; put him where you will, he comes naturally to the head and naturally assumes the sovereignty, whatever the occasion may be. A marvellous thing is this destiny. It is a pressure which cannot be explained in words ; it is the inexplicable force by which our life is compacted together. It cannot be ruled ; it cannot be modified ; it cannot be transferred ; it cannot be sold for mountains of silver. A man can only get rid

of destiny as he gets rid of God. "Paul and certain other prisoners." Here is sovereignty strangely and subtly shaded by humiliation. The very fact that the others were not named throws a kind of shadow upon Paul himself. He was one of the herd; he was head of the mob; he was the accent of the anonymous—the mere emphasis that gave it boldness and articulateness. A singular thing is this admixture of the great and the small, the light and the cloud, the sovereignty and the abjectness of position. We belong to one another, and are advanced by one another, and are kept back by one another; and a most singular and educative process of restraint and modification is continually proceeding amongst us.

"Julius courteously entreated Paul." How is it that Paul always stood well with men of the world? They took to him. There was a kind of natural kinship between them; there is amongst gentlemen. How do we pick out one man from another and say, as if ringing him on the world's counter, "That is good gold," or "That is counterfeit silver"? A wonderful thing this magic of recognition, this masonry of friendship, this brotherhood old as creation. Why run down what are called "men of the world"? They are so often the kings of men. I would never speak against men of the world who have "courteously entreated" me, to whom on some occasions I have owed my life, my progress, my enjoyment. Do not attempt to shake them off as an inferior race. They are only less bigoted than I am, less troubled by technicalities and distinctions and metaphysical ideas and divisions. They represent a broader judgment, a glowing, generous human nature. What they would be if they were in the spirit of Christ! Why, they would be kings of men, not dwindling, withered bigots whose blood has lost all its wine; they would make the Church warm; they would turn it into a hospitable home; they would breathe a south-west wind through our ill-ventilated souls. Oh, pray for them!

Here is Paul still inspiring confidence. His look was his certificate; his tone was his letter of recommendation. There are some men who might have a whole library of testimonials, and you would not believe a word they said, notwithstanding the huge burden of stationery. There are other men who need no card or letter or endorsement; honesty lives in their eyes, breathes from

their lips, warms in their hearty grip. Paul inspiring confidence is Paul preaching in silence. His Christianity is now eloquent. For the moment he is deposed from the platform which he made a throne ; but his moral qualities, his spiritual elements, his in-born and sanctified forces of mind and heart, are continuing and completing the ministry of speech. Paul was allowed "to go unto his friends to refresh himself"—a very happy English expression, but not really giving all the meaning of Paul's purpose or of his friends' hospitality. They really rigged him out again, clothed him. He was in sad plight. He was no particular patron of the clothier. Paul had been having a rough time of it as a prisoner, and now that he had the chance of running on shore for a little while at Sidon, his friends saw, as friends only can, that Paul would be none the worse for a new coat. There are many persons who live so very high above the cloud-line that they can take no notice of matters of such petty detail. But without saying a word to him, they got all things ready, and the clothes were laid there as if they had been laid there by Paul himself and he had forgotten to put them on before. There is a way of doing things—a delicacy infinite as love. Paul never had occasion to speak ill of his friends in these matters : he said, "I have too much ; if one Church did not give it to me, another did, and upon the whole I have an abundance ; but whether I have or not, I have learned in all things to be content."

Thus we have Paul in three aspects : Paul a prisoner, but the chief figure ; Paul courteously entreated, still inspiring confidence ; Paul amongst his friends, still an object of affectionate interest. He has not much now to stand upon, not much in superficiality, but, oh ! so much in depth ; only a foothold, but what he stands upon stands itself upon the core of the universe. Do not always take the superficial measure ; see what your position cubes up to, for figures do not all lie on one line.

We come now to say that the voyage was delayed. Thank God for delays. We should think much of the providence of postponement, hindrance, baffled project, and time apparently wasted. Why not let God keep the time-bill ?—much better in his hands than in ours. This was exactly what Paul needed, and Paul was permitted to enjoy it by the providence of God—a good tossing on the water, a new kind of exercise, an abundance of fresh air.

“ Oh, rest thee !” would seem to be the voice of every wind that kept the ship back on her course. God giveth his beloved sleep ; God giveth his beloved rest by keeping the ship at sea a long, long time. There is nothing like it ; great nurse-water, great mother-ocean, beautiful, blessed ministry of the rocking winds ! It is all right. Why so impatient, little fool ? Why all this racket and noise and wish to be on shore ? The shore can do well without thee two weeks longer. Believe me, the shore will be as grand and quiet in thine absence as it would be if thou wert standing upon it—rest. Delays are not lost time when properly accepted, when sanctified by prayer. We do not like delay ; that is because we are little and weak and unwise. We could do with some men if they were less impatient. They fret us by their eternal fever. You cannot get some men to sit down ; nor are they to be converted by lecture, philosophy, or religious exhortation. They pine to be up again ; they do not know their restlessness ; they do not know how they are exciting and annoying other people. They call it energy, activity ; they tell lies to themselves and eat the bad confectionery as if it were solid food. It is the Lord’s delight to teach us that the universe can get along without the aid of the very biggest man that is in it. The Lord is continually showing us that however long our bill of mortality, the solar system swings on as if we had never dug a grave. Take your bafflings, your hindrances, your delays, your postponements—often so puzzling and vexatious—as parts of a mysterious but beneficent providence, the purpose of which is the complete education and the final refinement of the human soul.

Paul, in the next place, ventured to speak upon subjects other than religious. In the tenth verse we read : Paul said, “ Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.” Paul was observing, putting one day to another, running a silent process of logic through his own mind ; and when he had completed the reasoning he spoke out. What right had Paul to speak ? The eternal right. Under ordinary circumstances, the landsman has no right to speak on board ship. But what are ordinary circumstances ? Affairs which may be measured by a tape line, little incidents that occur within the scoop of the hand. That is momentary etiquette or discipline ; but there are eternal laws,

eternal rights, and there come times when all human discipline is suspended and when man must speak as man. These are the critical times when our education takes great leaps ; these are the occasions which make heroes, martyrs, leaders. There is a law of time, but it is involved in the greater law of eternity ; there is a law of custom, which must be respected within given limits, because it is necessary to the momentary convenience and the incidental progress of society ; but there is an eternal law which overrides, supersedes, or destroys it. One must enter into the mystery of the higher life to understand this. There are occasions upon which a landsman speaking on board ship would be snubbed by the whole company of sailors ; there are other times when the sailors would be thankful for any landsman to speak if he could utter one word of rational hope. These are the times the Christian is waiting for. For the Christian to speak when the ship is going merrily over the blue waves, it would be impertinence, it would be fanatical piety ; but the Christian waits. The ship comes into difficulty, the sailors begin to look despairingly at the whole situation ; illness is about ; the air is troubled ; fortune is vexed, and has lost her way to the old quarters where she stored her gold—now, if any of you can say a word of comfort, do say it. The Christian is waiting for those times. The moment the door stands on jar, he is in ; the moment the opportunity shadows itself, he seizes it. Be wise and do not speak before the time, or your words will be like good seed sown upon the fickle and noisy wind. The clock will strike for you—be ready when the hour beats. The word will keep, and when it is spoken after long delay it will come with the more thundering resonance, with the more penetrating emphasis. Know, ye swearing sailors, rioting mariners, that the time will come when you will be glad to hear another voice than your own ! For that time the Christian apostle waits. But Paul was disbelieved. Certainly ; because the circumstances were not quite mature. But the religious man turned out to be right, as he must always turn out to be. The theologian—mock him as you like—is by necessity the greatest man in the universe. Why ? Because being true to his own philosophy—not a dabbler in words and a mechanician in arrangements and adaptations—he lives in God. That is my definition of the theologian ; not a learned pedant, not a man who knows a hundred

languages and never says anything worth hearing in any of them, but the man who lives in God, in heaven, who hears the first intimation of the Divine movement. He must be the greatest adviser, the truest counsellor of society ; otherwise the word which we believe to be inspired is a lie : it says : " The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." All inspired history shows that the first communications were made to the piety of the day, to the prayer of the time. The first intimations of Divine movement were made at the altar, when men of obedient heart shut their eyes, clasped their hands, bent down before the holy stone and waited for God ; they heard the going of the Most High in the wind, and they were the first to report what they were the first to hear. All true wisdom is with the theologian. He knows more about sailing than captains who do not pray can ever know. He may not always have the faith that would make him master, but he has the spirit which makes him wise. These are questions not to be settled within little limits. Things may look large because they are near ; may seem to be different because of their closeness ; but when looked at from lofty heights they sink into insignificance, and their dissimilarities are blurred in the common cloud. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him ; and he will give thee thine heart's desire. Even the prisoner shall have his sovereignty ; even a man in outwardly trying and discouraging circumstances may have the confidence of those who are appointed to watch over him ; and even the man who is supposed to know nothing but religion may turn out to be in the long run the comforter of men who live in mere technicalities. Paul in trouble—when was he out of it ? Paul in danger—it was from his Christian birth his native air. For Paul to have been in luxury and in comfort would have been a puzzle which even his religious genius could not have penetrated. Paul in the storm-tossed ship—yes ; so was Jesus Christ. The servant can never get in front of the Master. Paul can never say to Jesus, " Lord, I can surprise thee by a new suffering ; I have been where even thy footprint could not be discovered."

This is the marvel of the history of Christ : that though so short in time, it covers all spaces. There is not a possible experience of the Christian life which was not anticipated by the experience of the Son of God. That is a mystery which amounts to an argu-

ment. Show me one thing we have done in the way of duty or endured in the way of suffering unknown to the experience and excluded from the lines of the history of Christ. How is it with your ship? Is it much tossed about? That is an inferior question as compared with the inquiry—"Is Christ on board?" How is it with your vessel? Steaming strongly and steadily towards the desired haven? Are you all well? Have you food enough and fire enough for the voyage? You return a hearty "Ay! Ay!" Be careful how you speak: boast not yourselves of to-morrow, for ye know not what a day may bring forth. You may be glad some time of an old rope thrown out to you. Do not boast. Do not forget the altar even in the ship. Do not turn away your thought from God. Even in the time of sunshine and rapid homeward movement, you cannot tell what may yet transpire. This will I do: I will leave my ship, myself, my destiny with God. He made me, shaped me, inspired me, has led me, fed me, until now; and if it be his will to dash me to pieces within a mile of home —— But, oh, it cannot be!

XCVIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou knowest where we are on the sea of life ; we cannot tell ourselves. The nights are weeks long ; we hear no voices in the roar of the wind ; we are verily driven. Then the sunshine comes, and the smooth water, and the lulling, dreamy wind ; then we take heart again and sing the song of joy, and look the look of hope, radiant as morning dawn. Then, again, the darkness : black night coming down like an infinite burden upon the world too small to carry it. Thus are we in sore tumult, and our heart is vexed with fear ; we are torn asunder, one part of the life from the other, so that we have not the use of our whole strength ; we are divided men, and our souls are without their own consent and force. Behold, this is life—strange life, short life, yet within it so much space for trouble. But this is not all. Thou hast meanings of grace and love yet to be revealed, and when we know thy purpose in all its fulness we shall forget the earth as we forget the night that is gone. Thou meanest to redeem the earth, to take us to thyself ; having bought us with blood and cleansed us in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and educated us by all the providence of life's eventful day, thou dost mean to set us among the saints who walk in white and whose delight it is to serve thy throne. We will look on to the larger time ; we will not consider this little feverish day the whole span of being, but will lay hold of the endless life, and in its sublime power rule the fear and vexation of the present moment. This is the victory of faith ; this is the triumph of thy saints ; this is the miracle of grace ! Lead us in this direction. Bid us look up when the stars are all out and the whole host of heaven is glittering with delight ; and as we gaze upon the infinite pomp tell us that it is nothing but a symbol of what it cannot adequately express of power and wisdom and love, all of which is ours in Christ Jesus. Thou art good : full of tenderness and loving-kindness and saving health. Thou dost not delight in the destruction of men, in the overthrow of human purpose, and in the confounding of natural desire ; thou dost mean to sanctify us, build us up, complete in us some beneficent purpose, and shape the ruin of our life into a temple of worship, into a palace for a king. We are poor and needy ; we cannot bear much prosperity ; it drives us beyond the right centre ; it unsettles our thought ; it prostrates us before our own ability. We say, " This is our doing," and, " Behold the result of our cleverness and the harvest of our genius" ; and thus we forget thee, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Give us

what we can bear. If we can bear poverty rather than wealth, we shall be rich in our destitution. The Lord undertake our whole life for us, every whit of it and every day. May we never deceive ourselves into the delusion that we can manage the concerns of one moment, or do without God for one breath. Keep us steady, constant, steadfast, noble, true. May our ruling purpose always be right ; then, though we slip in the detail and are found faulty and unworthy here and there, yet the great column of our life shall be perpendicular and strong, pointing straight up to God's light and God's throne. The Lord help us as we need to be helped. Show every man that he has more mercy in his life than he has yet counted. Give us that eye of love which seeks for the goodness of thy providence, and take away from us that evil eye which delights in finding out the crookedness and the gloom of life. Take up all the little children and baptize them with the dew of the morning. Bring forth all the parents to the altar and baptize them with fire. Take out thy whole Church into wilderness or fair garden and baptize thy host with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Acts xxvii. 20-24.

20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, *Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.*

22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

THE TEACHINGS OF IMPOVERISHMENT.

“ **A**ND when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” What have we to do with sun and stars ? Is not one world sufficient at a time ? We are travellers, and it is enough for us to mind the road without caring for the sun ; we are mariners, and surely it is enough for us to keep the ship right without troubling our heads about the stars. This is the vain and empty talk of persons who mistakenly call themselves secular and practical. When we come to adapt things and to look

at them in all their bearing and their totality we find that really the earth is the very smallest thing we have to do with. Surely we can get along through the water, though it be tossed and vexed, without heeding the far-away stars—little glints of yellow light? It so happens that we cannot safely move without them. We have to consult them; we have to inquire where the moon is, or the sun, or the Pole-star; and sometimes one brief glimpse of a planet will tell us exactly where we are on the earth. Why, even cursing sailors have to be, in a sense, religious—even men who say they have got enough to do with the ship without troubling their heads about anything else are obliged to confess that the ship is in the leash of the planets, part of the great astronomy belonging to an infinite compactness and grandeur of things. So, from a thousand points and in a thousand unsuspected ways, there comes upon us the sweet Gospel doctrine: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." They are foolish who think they have only to do with one world. They are ineffably, infinitely foolish who suppose that things are what they seem, and that they can see everything exactly as it is. Again and again, by many a dream, by many an inexplicable touch, God shows us that this earth, so far away from all its kindred sparks, is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. I know it is possible to belittle the occasion, to take the earth as a flat and immovable surface, to neglect the stellar lights and let them glitter in ghostly unmeaningness, and to rake and scrape in the mud; but we do not choose to avail ourselves of that narrow possibility. We believe in getting into the rhythm of things, committing ourselves to the great astronomic movement; not in creating little spaces for ourselves, but in inhabiting our Father's house and submitting to his gracious domination.

"All hope that we should be saved was then taken away." This is what God has to do with every one of us before he can get a hearing. If you leave a man a walking-stick, he will believe he can do something with it; if you leave him with one blade of grass, you make an atheist of him. He must be stripped—without crumb or speck or atom, without light or strength or hope; he must have nothing in him but the last breath before God can get a hearing from his own image and likeness; so stubborn is the human will, so self-reliant is human vanity, so mad is unregulated

reason. Trace your best thoughts back to their origin, find out the day when you gave yourself away to Christ at the holy altar, and you will find it was upon a day when all other hope was dead. I looked for one to save, and there was none ; for some to pity, and there was no eye to shed a tender tear ; then his own eye pitied, his own arm brought salvation. This is a mysterious thing, incredible if it were a suggestion, only credible because it is an appalling and indisputable fact. Any devil can lure us away from the sacred altar ; it seems as if we wanted to go. Is that not the experience of every heart ? It takes all heaven's chains of gold to bind us to the altar ; it takes but the beckoning finger of some mocking imp to bid us leave it in glad haste. We have to be argued into religion, watched whilst we are in the very church lest we should escape by crevice unknown to every sense but the acuteness of the desire that longs to leave the sacred fane. We require to have all kinds of considerations brought to bear upon us to make us pray, talk to our Father, speak upward into the light ; but on the smallest provocation we turn fool again and hug the earth, forgetting that we are but embracing a grave. It is good of God to take away all we have ; it is kind of condescending Heaven to conceal all the stars and leave us to sit down at the black table of darkness to eat what we can of the roaring wind. These providences have meaning. Poverty is not an accident which any clever economist can arrange or remove : poverty is part of the mystery of the human economy, as is blindness, as is sin. They are not reformers, they are self-seeking empirics, who take down their little instruments with a view to sweeping poverty off the face of the earth. Poverty is God's agent. Civilisation without poverty would be poor civilisation. There is a mystery in these things not to be laughed at, easily mitigated, quickly dispelled. Poverty may be the true wealth. Do then we find the ship in a state of hopelessness, given up to the gloom, eleven nights crowding their black darkness into one horrible density, and on that ship—poor, undergirded thing, held and strung up in every possible way—there lies the dead, white-faced angel—Hope ? It is a corpse the ship carries : the dead thing is Hope. Some hearts are now carrying that dead angel : all hope gone ; the doctor said last night, regarding the sufferer, " There is no hope." The letter that came yesterday morning reporting the condition of

affairs at a distance said. "There is no hope." Yea, the last daring little prayer was so short of faith that it fell dead back from the clouds and said to the heart that misconceived it, "There is no hope." We now want a Gospel voice—sweet, clear, ringing voice—from some blue cloud; we shall hear it, or this house has ceased to be the house of God.

The whole situation is now given up to religious direction. That is how the world-ship will be some day, the earth vessel. All the captains and mates and other officers—the statesmen, economists, philosophers—will stand back and let the praying men speak. We are waiting for that day. Then the necromancer will strike his tent to go home and mope in sullenness; then they who plied the ear with sounds that had no sense in them will cease their empty noise; then all the little tricksters who said they would set the world right by programmes and investments will skulk out of any door or window that may be available; and then we shall hear God's Gospel and wonder we never listened to it before, so unapproachable in majesty, so ineffable in tenderness, so infinite in hospitality. Christ's day is coming. Before its full dawn many men will have proposals to make and new ventures with which to dupe the generation. Paul is now the master of the ship. You cannot keep back the true primacies of life. For a time you snub them, undervalue them, pour contempt upon them; but their hour comes, and they assert themselves in the name and grace of heaven. Paul began as a prisoner; he ended as the captain. He went upon the ship quite humbly; now he stands up, as it were, four-square, and all the men are at his feet. There is a prophecy in these things, a sublime forecast, a subtle and most sacred omen. How will he speak in the darkness? "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss." It is difficult for the noblest man to keep back all rebuke. Paul is rather smaller there than we have been accustomed to see him. He would have been a greater man if he had not said those words; but who can be more than man? Just a little reproach, just a gentle reminder of your folly, just one little touch to bring to your recollection how you played the fool about a fortnight ago. It would have been better if he had not said this from some points of view; and yet who are we that we should rebuke the great soul

—we who deal in reproaches, who never allow the four-and-twenty hours to complete themselves without stinging somebody by an unkind reference to the past? We had better drop such criticism and get into broader and more welcome pasture.

Paul, therefore, said, "Be of good cheer." Now he is himself. That is the voice we wanted to hear. We did not care for the rebuke—the thing was past and gone; a mistake was made and never could be unmade—we want to hear Gospel words; we hear them in this exhortation, "Be of good cheer." That is the pastor's heart, the great shepherdly love, the glorious leading voice. That voice is amongst us to-day in Christ's Gospel. We might spend long hours in rebuking ourselves for having loosed from Crete. There are some men who never can let you alone without reminding you what you might have done a month since. We wonder that such persons are permitted to live, for there is no room on this little earth for wisdom so illimitable. How stinging their tongue! How unkind every remark! "If you had listened to me last week, you would not have been in this position to-day." What a marvellous thing that so wise a man can be spared from heaven! "If you had done what I advised you to do seven years since——" What amazing rivalry with Omniscience! Is there no man who can tell me what to do now? Is there no great kingly soul, O Father! O Shepherd! that will say, "But be of good cheer"? There is. This is Gospel day; this is Christian sunlight; this is our Father's house. Let us admit that we got wrong in loosing from Crete; as a matter of fact, we did loose from Crete, and the question is now: What is to be done? and whilst we are asking that question a Gospel-voice answers us, "Be of good cheer. This is the way; walk ye in it." Oh for the spirit of obedience to spring, in instantaneous reply, saying, "Thy will be done"!

So far this speech of Paul's is a remarkable instance of human sagacity. Will Paul limit his address to lines that are purely sentimental? He never did so before; he will not do so now. "For," said he—that is the word of the logician, the solid and continuous reasoner, the man who builds his life-house upon rocks—"For"—now we shall have the reason—"there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve." He will preach, he must preach, he cannot help preaching. He

will bring good into that ship ; he is not going to play the amateur sailor, he is going to be faithful to this religious call and election. How the men listened !—men who had never heard a sermon in their lives ; men who did not know the meaning of the word “ God,” as Paul then pronounced it. What an eager audience ! That is what we want now : an audience all ear ; not men lazing in the house if haply they may catch some sound that pleases them, but intent, stretched forward, drawing out of the speaker an eloquence not his own, because born of inspiration Divine.

XCIX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art the Giver of all gifts that are good and perfect. Thou art always giving ; thou dost love to give. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Thou hast set up in him the centre of hope and truth and faith. He is All in All. He is the Beginning without beginning ; the End without end ; the Mystery ; Immanuel. If we may but touch the hem of his garment, we shall be made whole. Surely thou wilt not forbid us to touch that healing hem. Nay, more, thou dost call upon us to touch his very heart and feel the tender efficacy of his blood. Thou dost not exclude, but include, the sons of men. Thy love is a great height ; thy love is a great depth. No line is to be laid upon it. It is like thyself, beginning with thy beginning and continuing with thy duration. The Lord's mercy abideth for ever. It is a light that cannot be blown out, a glory that no cloud can conceal. We live and move and have our being, not in thy power only, but in thy mercy and thy love. Thou dost fill us with great wonder. Surely sometimes thou dost almost mock us by condescensions that seem to be revelations, and then gather themselves up into great mysteries. But thou art training us so that we may at last see the light and face it with all the steadiness of such qualification as thou alone canst give. We believe in the end of thy processes, though we cannot understand the manner ; nor can we explain the daily detail. All things work together, and they work together for good. Thou art building a temple amid all the wind and dust and cloud of tumultuous time ; and thou wilt not leave it until the topstone is brought on with great shoutings of "Grace ! Grace unto it !" inasmuch as thy purpose is completed. Here we stand in the righteousness of God, in the judgment and decree of Heaven. We are not tossed about with every wind of doctrine : we believe God ; we rest in the Lord, we wait patiently for him. He will come ; his tarrying is only according to our impatience ; his word is not forgotten. May we rest in thee, though the night be long and the lights all gone, and the wind quite high, and the sea white with wrath. May our vessel be a sanctuary ; may the darkness be the Divine cover, and after the storm may we hear the still small voice. We want to make the most and best of our little life. It is but a breath after all ; we waste it in using it ; we die whilst we live. May we make the most of the hours, counting them with scrupulous care, using each as if it were a solitary gem, and writing down the story of each as for the perusal of the Divine eye. Call us every morning from

our slumber. Give us peace every night after our labor. As the years grow and multiply, may they but bring immortality nearer and hasten us to our eternal youth. Remember those for whom we ought to pray—the prayerless, the dumb that never spoke at thy altar ; the heart speechless because faithless. We pray for the wanderer that he may see in what a maze he is laboring—returning always upon himself ; making no progress, only wasting strength. For the sick we pray—the solitary, the lonely, the sad. The earth is thine, and every living thing is a pulse of thine eternity. Let thy pity go out after it like a gospel, and speak comfortably to it, and refresh every heart with a new blessing. Speak to those who are in utter dejection, and whose despair has left faith far behind. Thou canst recover the shattered life ; thou canst build again the mind that has been thrown down. All things are possible with God. Hear us in our daily prayer. Enrich it with daily inspiration of thought and desire, and may we feel so assured that our prayers are Divine creations that in their very utterance we may find Divine replies.

We say our prayer at the Cross : elsewhere it would be but an empty wind ; but uttered at the Cross, in the sight of the Holy One, in the presence of the Atoning Blood, the feeblest word becomes a mighty plea, and the sighing of the heart is heard in heaven as a prevailing voice. Hear us and astonish us with a great answer. Amen.

Acts xxvii. 23-31.

23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer : for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

27. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country ;

28. And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms : and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

29. Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

PAUL PROFESSES A CREED.

THIS is a remarkable saying : " God hath given thee all them that sail with thee " (ver. 24). That is the philosophy of society. The whole ship was saved for Paul's sake. Your house is saved because of some one life that is in it. Any ship that carries you and me might be broken up by the storm—thrown away as an evil thing—because we are so bad and unworthy. But for the child's sake—the praying soul's sake—the old mother's sake—the pastor's sake—the timbers are kept together, and we shall yet touch land. How little is this vicarious principle understood ! We speak much about vicarious suffering ; that is only half a truth. We speak of others suffering for us ; how little we speak of being saved because of the goodness of others ! This is the way in which prayer is often answered, that unworthy lives are enriched with new chances of repentance and return and adoption. God would wither the barren tree away, or cut it down, but for the husbandman's prayer. It is part of the mystery of his grace that he should say to the gardener, " If you wish it, you may keep it another year." Omnipotence allows itself to be moulded by prayer ; Almightyness is willing to be softened by human tears. This is not to be explained in words. If it were less than Almightyness, it would consume itself by its own fury ; but being Almightyness, we find in its repose the bloom of its power. It is hard sometimes to hear the bad man's mockery of things, and to hear the wicked man boast that he can get along very well without religion, or Bible, or church. The poor fool is so insane as to be beyond the reach of immediate reason. He sees only points, not lines ; he does not understand the philosophy, or grasp the totality, of the case ; he does not know that he owes the extension of his privileges to the very religion which he despises. Who, on that ship, thought that he was indebted for his life to the prisoner Paul ? Not a soul on board was aware that he owed his existence, his salvation from danger, to the prisoner who was in chains. We do not know our creditors ; we cannot tell where our obligation begins or ends. This is a mystery in which there is infinite joy. It sets my life in new relations, and enriches it with new hopes. For what I know,

a thousand ministries may be operating upon it that I cannot name or measure. Why should I attempt to estimate all things by my sight or by any sense I have? It is more joyous to throw myself into the astronomic sweep and roll of things and be rocked in an infinite strength. That is faith. Every flower that grows in my garden is an answered prayer; every beam of morning light that plays on the paper on which I set down my thought is the result of a ministry long since passed away from the earth. If you like, you can receive flowers and lights and dawns, mornings and middays as accidents without root or meaning, or far away explanation; but if you so receive them, they will be as guests that call upon you when you are not at home. Better take your life as an answer to prayer—a thing spared because some one prayed for it—than receive it as an accident, or treat it as a mechanical course. If this were an isolated incident, we might seem to be making too much of it; but it is a golden thread that runs through the whole Biblical story, and that continues its gracious extension through our own consciousness and experience. In Genesis we read that God blessed the house of Potiphar “for Joseph’s sake.” Trace that same thought through every page of Biblical history, and you will find that it is God’s method of working—namely: to bless one man for the sake of another. That historical fact reaches the fulness of its significance in the gift and priesthood of the Son of God; and so our prayers are taken up from the region of weary helpless words into prevalent eloquence by the expression, “for the sake of thy dear Son.” He is the Joseph for whose sake the whole world is kept together, even in its present patched and dangerous condition; he is the Paul for whose sake the storm-smitten ship is kept upon the water and not under it; it is for his sake that time is lengthened and that opportunities are multiplied. This is the Christian faith; this is the Christian life.

Let us hear Paul in this great darkness. There may be light in his words: some men speak light. Maybe, Paul’s words will light up the black heavens, and make the unquiet sea peaceful. What did Paul say? “I exhort you to be of good cheer. . . . For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” There is personal character, religious qualification, a right set and attitude of the soul in relation to things

unseen and forces Divine. The expression is not "whose I am" only—that would but indicate the fatal and the inevitable. All things are God's. The young lions roar and seek their bread and their meat from God. Paul adds, "and whom I serve." Thus his own consent was secured. He was one with God—one in sympathy, one in purpose. He had no will but God's. He never did anything for himself : he toiled in the field of Another for the glory of its great Proprietor. That was a bold word to say. It drove the darkness off like a frightened thing. It was the very word we wanted—the great solar word, that plunged into the infinite gloom and scattered it. How nobly it sounds under certain circumstances ! If we speak it pithlessly, it takes rank with any words short and empty ; but if we pronounce the word GOD with the energy of conviction, with the graciousness of gratitude, with the pathos of helplessness, it soon disbands the hosts of darkness and sets a great light in the centre of things. Men can never pronounce aright the word God until they feel aright the doctrine of God.

The angel said, "Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer." That is the effect of a glad soul. One life set in the right key makes a whole house merry. Do not wait for the unanimous consent of all parties in order to make the house ring again with song and vibrate with sacred and rapturous dance. One cheerful soul, one glad spirit, one mind that sees things aright and grasps them in their unity, will find the music ; and when a tune is once begun, how comparatively easy it is to take it up ! We are waiting for the leader in the Church ; we are waiting for the soul that dare advance within the family circle ; and when the master-spirit gives the key-note, a thousand voices will take up and continue the expression of its exultation.

Only the religious man can be truly glad. Believe me, there is no joy out of rectitude with God ; there is laughter, there is noise, there is uproar, there is tumult, there is an ecstasy that will not bear to-morrow's reflection ; but as for gladness, health of soul, real, true, rational abiding, as much awake at midnight as at midday and at midday as at midnight, this gladness is the child of righteousness. There may be the deepest joy in what is apparently

the deepest melancholy. A man is not necessarily unhappy because he is silent ; he is the more likely to be happy when his tongue is quiet and his tears express his rapture. The religious man has his enjoyments in the very midst of his distresses. I know hardly any sentence of the Apostle Paul's which has filled me with so much true ecstasy and rapture as a sentence he wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians. In the seventh chapter of that letter he says, "I am filled with comfort ; I am exceeding joyful," or literally, "I rejoice exceedingly in all our tribulation." What a marvellous force was that which could turn distress into joy, which could transform tribulation into delight ! What a miracle to take in all the black messengers of evil, set them down in the house, and see them gradually whiten into radiant angels of God ! No other religion than the religion of Christ can produce such miracles—not the miracles of an ancient time, but the marvellous surprises of our own life.

In the midst of all this darkness, Paul professed a creed. We talk about "the Apostles' Creed," and the words are not ill-chosen. What is this but the Apostles' creed ? Paul said, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer : for I believe God." A short creed, but a pregnant one. He risks everything upon it. There is not room in it for qualification, reserve, or for all subtle suppressions which destroy the energy and the pith and the mystery of faith. This is a dew-drop holding within its comparative smallness of form all the mystery and all the meaning of the sea. When did Paul say this ? Paul said it in extremity, when there appeared to be no God. Paul said it in an empty house, nothing left but the bare walls, and the walls reeling, trembling, quaking under an infinite shock of uncontrollable strength. That is the time to profess your creed. We cannot speak our true creeds at the library window, up to which there rolls the velvet lawn upon which blossom the vernal trees, within which repose all the masters of knowledge and the wizards of genius. Under such circumstances, what creed can a man have ? Under such circumstances, a man does not hold himself : he is a doll on the lap of luxury. It is when he is torn limb from limb, mocked, spat upon, cursed, held over hell's fire, that he knows what he really believes. Here it is that Christianity has lost power : it has

become a fine threadlet of argument, a subtle conundrum, a department of transcendental metaphysics, a thing which only cunning minds can comprehend and trained tongues can adequately express. It is no longer a heroic faith, a great utterance of conviction, a heart so full that it cannot speak, a mind so mad that it cannot settle itself down to the prison of logical and pedantic forms. We will begin to discuss what was never meant for discussion. If the wolf were nearer, we should have a good deal less argument and a great deal more prayer. What would be thought of your children if they made it their business to write essays upon their father every week, and if they were to justify their essay-writing by the protestation that it was needful to have "intelligent conceptions of fatherhood"? Would not the grey-haired old father smile to see his little child commencing an essay on "the psychology of my father"; on "the marvellous methods adopted by my father in the government of his family"; on "the various faculties of my father, and the mystery of their exercise"? His old, wrinkled face would smooth itself out to a great smile when he saw the poor little toiler dipping his pen to round off into rhetorical completeness a sentence that would precisely describe "the method of father's government." He would rather have one big hug than all the essays the infant scribe could write, one great all-round hug than the finest metaphysical analysis which the infantile psychologist could perpetrate. But this is how we do with our great Father; and when we do it, we call it "obtaining an intelligent"—that's a word that will ruin some men—"conception of God." The "intelligent conception" is faith, love, the great morning kiss on heaven's face, the great nightly hug round heaven's neck. Argument—what is argument? A confession of dissonance and want of unanimity, a battle of words. When shall we learn that no one man can contain all the truth—that no one mind is roomy enough to hold the entire revelation of God? We see God as we see the universe: one man sees the geology of the earth, another its geography; a third searches with eager quest the chambers of the lights above. It is the same universe, and we need all the views of all the men in order to combine into one massive totality the complete meaning of things. Beware of those teachers who pin you down to definitions in words. For example, a pedantic mind will say to you, "What

do you mean by God?" Say you mean what you cannot tell. A God that can be explained is a God that can be abandoned, or patronised, or kept in the house for occasional purposes. Others will say, "What do you mean by belief?" You mean all the actions of the soul in one sublime and inexplicable effort. You have not to account to the pedants for your creed, but to account to God, by loving service, for your faith. We have words on the road, but the end will be song, just as in the training of the young mind. Consider the imbecility of teaching a child to pronounce words of two letters! But is that the end of your instruction? If it were, it would not be worth doing. It is part of a process: first the letter, then the two letters, then the three; the syllable, the two syllables, and the whole word; and then the rhythm of words, so that they are not pronounced singly, as if they had no relation to one another, but with the fluency which is rhythm, the intermingling and gliding which is true eloquence; and then the music that says to speech: "We are much obliged to you for what you have done, but your mission is over: now let us praise God." So we go in earthly training from letter to syllable, from syllable to word, from word to eloquence, from eloquence to music; and that is but an analogue by which we may see the larger process, the grander culture, which shall end in the song of the hundred and forty and four thousand, and thousands of thousands, and a number which no man can number—the anthem that fills the universe and satisfies its infinite Creator. So Paul did not descend to analysis, nor did he vex the minds of his fellow-passengers by definitions: he uttered a short, terse phrase as his sublime faith, and founded upon it a gospel for all the world that was with him. Paul did not say that he had invented this hope; he said rather that it was granted to him by a revelation—an angel stood by him and gave him a message. That is the only ground on which we can stand in religious matters. Consciousness has its value, so has impression, so has reasoning; but the Word is the only rock on which we can securely build. We are saved by the outward, not by the inward—that is, by something beyond ourselves, not by something in ourselves. We are instructed by others, we are trained by others, we are corrected by others; why this infinite mystery about being saved by others? It is the culmination of processes with which

we are familiar, and which ought not to be turned into a theological riddle. In all the great crises of life, when vital questions are uppermost, when great results are impending, we want an authoritative voice. We are then impatient with any man who says, "I have an impression," or "It occurs to me," or "I venture to suggest." We want a voice from heaven, an assurance from God. As Christians, we believe that such a word is in the Bible. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Let us rest here awhile. Let us think of this in our own dark nights. Let us call it to mind in our own little ship when strained and creaking sorely as if in pain. God's sea is great; our boat is small. It is never God's way to thrust his great power against our weakness—to batter down with his thunder the reed that is bruised.

C.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast said unto each of us, "What is thy petition? and what is thy request? and it shall be granted unto thee." Lord, teach us what to say in reply. This is the challenge of thy love. Thou dost tempt our powers to ask great things of thee, knowing that giving doth not impoverish thee, nor withholding enrich thee. Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. We have no words equal to the treasures of God. Do thou give unto us the faith which is its own answer, its own peace, as it is its own inspiration. Faith is the gift of God; but having given unto us faith, thou hast given unto us all things. If we had faith even as a grain of mustard-seed, we could remove mountains, and turn back seas out of our way, and make the desert blossom as the rose. Lord, increase our faith! When it comes to us we know it by a great uprising of the soul into nobler life, into wider domination and power. We would have more of it: we would live by faith and not by sight. We would thus have the larger life. Lord, increase our faith! Thou dost call us to trust in thee, and to have no fear. Thou alone canst give us the perfect love which casteth out fear and setteth the soul in infinite calm. Every good gift is thine. We have nothing that we do not receive. We live upon thy bounty; we are guests at thy table; we shelter ourselves in thy house. The Lord's mercy be multiplied unto us, and the Lord's comfort encourage and strengthen our souls! We come before thee because with the Lord is abundance of pardon and plenteous forgiveness, that he may be sought unto and feared with all the sacred reverence of love. Pardon our sin. Cleanse us in the holy blood of Christ; yea, wash away all guilt, and give us the sanctification which is the miracle of the Holy Ghost. Sanctify us—body, soul, and spirit. Subdue our whole nature to thy government. Create in us the spirit of obedience. Lead us to see that our faith means sacrifice, or it is void of meaning. Regard us all. How many our frailties; how countless our sins: how varied our needs! But thou knowest us every one: our frame, our nature, our opportunities, our temptations, our engagements. Thou dost count us up and understand us wholly, and there is nothing in us that is hidden from the searching of thine eye. Have mercy upon us! Lord, pity us! Lord, come to us through the way of the Cross, mighty to save, with great answers to great questions, with the infinite fulness of God, in reply to the prayers of men. Let the old traveller feel that it is better farther on. Give the young worker to

know that to build below the skies is to build without foundation and without power of completion. Show the youngest that there is no safety out of thy movement and beyond thy law. Comfort the discouraged. Give unto the disappointed soul new hope and new opportunities. Let all the past be turned into a school, and, learning its lessons, bowing under its discipline, may we begin to-morrow with a new heart and a new hope, having behind us yesterdays full of experience and full of teaching ; and thus may our mistakes become the beginnings of our wisdom, may our failures contribute to our successes, and may all the scorning and the trial, the tempting and the scourging, of time and life bring us nearer to thyself, thou holy Christ of God. Amen.

Acts xxvii. 20-44.

20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in 'the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer : for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

27. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country ;

28. And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms : and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

29. Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat : for this is for your health : for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all : and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39. And when it was day, they knew not the land : but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground ; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose ; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land :

44. And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

THE SUPREME VALUE OF LIFE.

“**T**HERE stood by me this night the angel of God” (ver. 23). That is just when we need the angel most ; and the angel is never kept back when we really need him. An angel at night seems to be a double blessing because of the surrounding darkness. Words of sympathy are always good, but they are the very balm of heaven when the heart is sore, and, so to say, opening its lips with great thirst that it may drink of the water of life. Did the angels ever come in the daytime ? We cannot answer that question without consideration, but memory supplies innumerable instances in which the angels have come in the night season. Some of our earliest recollections are of angels wrestling with us, when we could see no light in the nightly sky,—nameless angels ; angels that could have crushed us, but only bruised us ; angels that could have torn us to pieces, but only put

out one joint to show their omnipotence. The night has a story all its own. Any vulgar pen can write the story of the day ; but the night, with its distances, its mysteries, its half-voices, its almost things, must be a troubled dream in the affrighted imagination. Yet some nights we want to live over again. There was joy in the agony, there was friendship in the ghostliness, there was a music in the going, that we want to hear just once more, if haply we might take hold of something with both hands, until the noise was over. I would not live without this supplementary life, this ensphering and comforting life, these hints of worlds that make the sun a mere speck. I am tired of the little bigness of the sun ; I am thankful to hear of flames that blind him, and of sizes that reduce him to insignificance. God thus appeals to the fancy which he stuns, and turns imagination itself into a religious faculty, and makes wonder go for prayer. Yet it takes a courageous man to say, in a materialistic age, that an angel has spoken to him. He will be called mad. But to call a man mad is, when we come to think of it, not to make him mad. What is madness ? It is a relative term. There is a madness of insensibility, a madness of indifference, a madness of unpardonable stupidity amongst the appealing and exciting sublimities of things. Why should we call the unseeing beast sober, and the burning, flying poet mad ? We must rectify our standards. To-morrow, or even to-day, we must take our balances into the sanctuary and have them tested by the Divine weights. But this is a ladder whose foot is upon the earth, though its head be lost in the high light ; so we will come down the ladder, round by round ; and, mayhap, when we descend it fully, we may find that it rests on logic and lifts itself up into rapture. Let us see if this be not so.

Paul says of God, " whose I am, and whom I serve." So the revelation was not made to a fanatic, but to a servant, a toiling man, one who had set his hands to the Gospel plough. Thus we are coming down into cold reason. This is not foam, this is not mere glitter of words, this is not the completion of a phrase ; it is at once the beginning and the end of an argument. " Whose I am——" But all men are God's. Yes, in a sense ; but there is another ownership, an inner life, a warm, comforting, all-protecting, sacred sonship and fatherhood and mystery of communion. Paul was always God's ; the centurion and the sailors

were God's—where is the specialty of the claim “whose I am, and whom I serve”? We must enter into this spiritual mystery. We are twice God's: we are “born again”—yea, truly, as it were, again and again and every day—born to some higher life, into some nobler power, into some tenderer love, into some wider ownership of truth and life. It is a mystery; no words fit it; we must live it to know it.

“Whom I serve.” Now we come lower down still into the region of what is termed reason and fact. Did Paul serve God? Let his life answer. If he did not serve God, his life since that Damascus journey has no explanation, no meaning. Verily, from our reading, we would be the first to say to the inquiry “Did Paul serve God?” “Yes, night and day; in every thought, in every pulse, in every upheaving and strenuous energy of the soul.” Common fairness demands this tribute. We should lie to ourselves if we did not unanimously and affectionately say, “Yea, verily, Paul, mistaken mayhap, a fanatic perhaps, wild and mad as judged by Festus' rules and customs, but, O man! bent, withered, impoverished, despised, thou hast with both hands served God.”

The all-including thought arising out of this consideration is, that God's revelations are made, not to genius, but to character; not to ability, but to disposition; not to the greatest intellects, but to the tenderest and purest hearts. “To this man will I look”—God never changes the point of vision; the focus is never altered. “To this man will I look”—a broken-hearted, humble, contrite soul. In other words, “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Paul does not say, “The revelation was made to me because mine is the highest mind represented in this assembly, mine the brightest intellect, mine the loftiest reason, mine the noblest power of thought.” “The secret was revealed to me by him whose I am in every fibre of the body, every thought of the soul, every passion of the heart, and whom I serve with all the resources with which he has entrusted me, and with all the fire that burns in my being.” We should know more if we loved more; we should be greater theologians if we were better Christians. To the praying soul the revelation comes; when our eyes are shut in prayer, the vision of our soul is opened that we may

behold the sublimest realities of truth. If you would grow in knowledge, you must first grow in grace.

Then mark a wonderful characteristic of Paul, in that he pledges God. This is not a salvation that is to be worked out in the dim and unknown future. With a valour—shall we say an audacity?—singularly characteristic of himself, he pledges, in all its immeasurable infiniteness, the power of God to do this thing. How he will be covered with confusion presently if it be not so! In a few brief hours this boast will be reduced to confusion and dismay. There is a touch of prophetic knowledge in this pledging to God. “If it be not so,” said the old man, “then the Lord hath not spoken by my mouth. If that man die an ordinary death, I should be found a liar, in that I have said God has revealed the contrary to me.” A great mystery is this, that the child may pledge the Father to work out certain issues and complete them in happy fruition—a wondrous miracle; yes, it is even so. As to detail, we know nothing; but as to broad, substantial issue, we know everything. “Say unto the wicked man, Thou shalt surely die.” “Say unto the righteous, It shall be well with thee.” We know nothing as to time, mode, circumstance, changing phase and incident; but the issue is revealed in light.

What a wondrous picture of life then follows! We seem to have been in precisely those very circumstances. Have we not seen how great providences are affected by human action? “Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” This is a continual wonder to us, that life should go upon such little hinges; that the small wheels should, in their place, be just as important as the large one. “The shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship”; and Paul stopped them with this assurance: “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” There must be no tempting of God: there must be complete obedience. Sometimes the fight, so to say, between God and man, is brought down to the very narrowest and simplest incident. The battle is not always a grand one, or fought out upon a great field. We sometimes come into such close quarters with God that great issues depend upon shutting the door, looking out of the window, keeping the eyes

open, speaking one word. Thus are little things lifted up into importance, and details made part of the worship of life. There is nothing unimportant to Omniscience : the very hairs of your head are all numbered. There is nothing confused or indiscriminate and undiscriminating in the providence of Heaven. There is not a colour on an insect's wing that does not represent some thought of eternity. Do not take the view which would depreciate that which is matter of detail and comparative insignificance, for a great argument is founded upon God's care in these matters. Wherefore, if God so clothed the grass of the field ; so cared for the sparrows ; so looked after the daintiness of the lily, so that no hand but his own may paint its white purity ; how much more——? Then the argument opens until it becomes wide as the firmament and bright as the aggregated light of the universe. Is it not so in our own life, that often we fail at the little point, the comparatively insignificant thing, the incident that may be thrown into the sum total ? Are we not lost because our balances are not fine enough and because we do not work down to the minutest line, making obedience not a rough service, but a detailed and complete sacrifice ?

What a wonderful confirmation is given to a truth which seemed to astound us in our last study ! We then dwelt upon the thought that the world is saved because of its good men. " God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." We were not quite sure of this. All the historical allusions seemed to be good and sound ; but how the world should be kept sailing on through the great sea of space because of its ten righteous men we hardly understood. But singularly here is the very same truth stated within lines with which we are perfectly familiar. At a certain point in the voyage " the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept the soldiers from their purpose." So the prisoners were twice saved on Paul's account. The centurion did the very thing that God did, without knowing it. We are ruled by strange emotions ; passions, thoughts, impulses suddenly seize us, and we do things for the sake of others which we would not have done but for the presence of these personalities ; and thus and thus, on scales small and in ways unintended, we repeat the mystery of God, and show — ruined,

shattered, lost, as we are—that at first we were made in the image and likeness of the Creator. So the world is governed to-day. We are doing things to others for the sake of some peculiar personalities or special lives ; and so we could find our theology in our daily life, and proofs of Christian revelation in many an out-of-the-way field. Why this value set upon life? The men engaged in this stormy voyage did exactly what we are doing, did exactly what all the world has always been doing : they showed the supreme value of life. Why do not men give up life? Why do not the abject poor throw themselves into the river and there lose for ever their consciousness of misery and want? What is it that keeps some men alive? No home, no friend, no fortune, no joy, no light, no music, no fire in the grate, no summer for them, and yet they hug the life that is reduced to a burning agony. Surely there is some mystery in this circumstance, and surely some religious explanation of it. When the men had partaken of food on Paul's exhortation "they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea." When it comes to a contest between life and wheat, the wheat must go ; and in the end we read "the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship"—no property, nothing saved ; everything lost but life. What is the meaning of this? I would force the question upon myself. Why not lighten the ship by throwing out the men? Do not treat the question as trivial : behind it there is a solemn mystery. Learn from it the dignity of life ; the sublime, the Divine origin of life ; the marvellous compass and possible destinies of life. And whilst these great problems are at once agitating and comforting the mind that studies them, you may see some explanation of the incoming of the Son of man into the world. He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. I seem to understand that when I study the value which has been put upon life by men under all circumstances. Why struggle with the deep? Why this wrestling with the winds? Why not give in? Why not jump into the storm, and let it devour us? Why this eternal fight? Why these prayers that break through the agony and seem to say, "Life is very dear ; life is unspeakably precious ; everything for life. Better live in misery than die"? What is the meaning of it all but that we did not come up out of the dust, but that our spirit is from the Living God? It is the

witness of God in the soul ; it is life itself in a grand endeavour to explain its own mystery ; and there is no explanation but the Gospel one. That covers the whole ground and brings to harmonious conclusions all the inner controversies of the soul, and all the vexations incident upon our discipline. God made us ; God speaks in us. In the very least, poorest, meanest little child in London to-day God speaks through the agony of a life the child cannot part with and which the earth cannot satisfy. Thank God for these natural mysteries ! They help us so much when we come to ponder the profounder secrets which relate to God and to eternity.

CI.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we, being crucified with Christ, also rise with him, and prove our resurrection by setting our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We would live in the spirit of the resurrection; we would be as men who have already passed the gates of death, and would live in the light of thy countenance, and walk all day in the strength of thy favour. This miracle thou canst work, thou God of wonders. Even now, so full may our heart be of Christ's own life, that the bitterness of death may be passed. Enable us to feel the mystery we cannot understand. May we walk as men over whom death has no more power, saying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Show us these things day by day that we be no longer in bondage through fear of death, but enjoy the peace, the gladness, the holy inspiration of immortality. We bless thee for Easter Day,—day of triumph, day of trumpeting and singing on earth and in heaven. Thy Son, our Saviour, made every day he touched into a holy time. When he was born, the universe was re-created; when he died, creation became a sanctuary of darkness; when he rose again, the morning stars sang together for joy, and all heaven quivered with infinite rapture. This is the day of tender memory, compassion, grief, of the shining and speaking angels, of the heavens rent that we may see into the larger liberties. May we enter into the spirit of the day and be no longer sore of heart, or heavy of spirit; but, shaking off the clay, and ordering the common body to stand back, may we, in the power of the Spirit, join the songs of heaven. We entreat thee, on our own behalf, that as death was conquered, so sin may be overthrown; when the cause is destroyed the effect will cease. Abolish, by the mysterious power of the Cross of Christ, the presence and the dominion of evil in our hearts; then every morning will be resurrection-day, every noontide will be heaven. As for the few days we have to be on this side the golden gates, help us to be industrious, patient, large of mind, noble in charity. Knowing that at any moment the great golden portals may swing back for our entrance, may we be ready, washed in the blood of the Lamb, purified by the fire of the Holy Ghost, made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; may we hold the world with a light hand, letting it slip without sense of loss or pain, the momentary deprivation being overcome and lost in the infinite realisation of heavenly bliss. Help us to bear the burden, to toil up the last hill; and at the end may our only ailment be weariness that

will soon be healed. May there be no sin to heal, no guilt to cure, no unholiness to destroy ; but, at the last, may we be simply weary, outworn, quite tired, the journey all behind us, and our eyelids trembling because we want to sleep. Then will come the one touch of peace that will make us forget our weariness for ever. Amen.

CHRISTIAN PILOTAGE.

Acts xxvii.

(Continued.)

THE idea which I wish to make clear is, that as Paul was in that ship, so Christianity seeks to be in the world. We have spent a tempestuous month with all the sailors and prisoners, and we feel that the very spirit and destiny of the voyage are in us. We have seen what part Paul played in the tremendous tempest. What Paul was in that ship, Christianity seeks to be in the vessel of the world. The picture is a definite one : so definite that a child can follow its vivid lines. It is hung up before our vision now, and it will be for us to see, and having seen, to declare, that as Paul was in that storm-tossed ship, so Christianity seeks to be in the great ship of the earth.

What was Paul in that ship, tossed in Adria ? He took upon himself the direction of common affairs ; the master of the ship gave way, the centurion was no longer the centurion but in name, and the Apostle stood forward at the front and took upon himself the responsibility of the whole situation. That is what Christianity wants to do in the world,—to be the senior member in every firm, to be the director of every company, to be the head of every family, to be the one lamp in the dark night time, and to assume the leadership and the benediction of the world ; and that is what its own believers won't allow it to be and to do. They are willing to make an idol of it. The idol may choose the substance in which it will be represented, so far, so condescending does the patronage go. It says to the thing that is to be represented, " Shall it be ivory, white ivory, without stain or flaw, the dear little creature would like ? or gold, pure, refined ? Or shall it be some figure in diamonds and precious stones of every hue and water ? You can choose the form in which you will be imaged to the eye ; only express your wish, and to the last syllable

it shall be realised." That is the very thing that Christianity declines to be and declines to do. Christianity says, "I will go to business with you; I will keep your books for you; I will issue all your papers—sign and stamp them every one," and that is precisely what the hottest Christian on earth respectfully declines. Do we wonder then that the Church is empty, that the infidel is laughing, and that the great enemy is feasting himself at the table of prosperity? We have come under the domain of the unutterably evil sophism that Christianity is a set of theological views. Theological views cannot live long. Nobody wants them; there is nothing in them by themselves, limited to themselves, made to talk a metaphysical language which the earth and its children cannot understand. Christianity wants to take the captaincy of the world-ship. Can Christianity conduct the world-ship across the sea of space and time and bring it into the haven of rest? Yes; and that is the only captaincy under which the happy issue can be realised. What is the use of your saying your prayer in a few curt words in the morning and leaving your Christianity behind you while you put on an atheist's hat and go down to town leaning upon an infidel's staff?

It is a lie—black, flat, blasphemous. There are Christian people who say, "Leave to men of the world the direction of the world." No. As soon say, "Leave to agriculture the lighting of the stars." Men of the world are the most ignorant of men, the most impotent of men, the lamest, feeblest of men. In their mind there is no background, no perspective; there is no horizon in their thinking. Christians are the true statesmen, the true politicians, the true merchants; only they have never realised their calling and election of God. They have allowed themselves to be dwarfed and humiliated into certain chatterers of pious phrases; they have not seized the captaincy and proved that they were meant to lead the world. Behold the Apostle—prisoner, yet captain; standing uppermost in the ship; exerting a mysterious and other-world influence upon rough men; doing just what he pleases. That is where Christianity should be in the navigation of the world. Christianity understands everything. The praying man is the great man—he who sees God, and grasps in his all but infinite vision the petty details that make up what we call earthly life. The master of the ship and the centurion at first edged

Paul back into the stern, but they were obliged at the last to allow him to come forward. So it will be in the end of things : the captain that will take the ship in is Christianity, or the ship will never go in.

What did Paul do in that ship, tossed and torn by the rough and angry wind? He maintained the supremacy of God. In the twenty-fifth verse, he says, "I believe God." That is what Christianity seeks to be and to do in the world—to utter the word God in a tone that will amount to argument, with a pathos that will ensure conviction. The danger is that we pronounce the word God as if it were part of a common language and not a whole vocabulary in itself. We can degrade any word by the manner of its pronouncement. You can say the word "heaven" so flippantly as to take all the light out of it and quench all its thundering of music. You can pronounce the word "father," or "mother," or "home," so lifelessly that nobody will know you have uttered the sacred term. The meaning is in the pronunciation. The printer lags behind the speaker, trying to do the impossible, for soul will not be printed. Do we pronounce the word God just as an infidel would pronounce it? No wonder we lose the argument. The word is nothing if it be not full of soul, passion, fire, blood. The utterance of the word should be a sacrifice. Christianity seeks to remind the world every day of the existence, government, personal superintendence, fatherly love, and motherly care of God. God is not an Old Testament word only. It is curious to observe how some words hardly carry themselves into the new covenant writing. They were noble words in the old book, they were part of it, they belonged to it, there was a kind of nativity about their position and relationship ; but they could not transfer themselves into the new music ; but the word God came right across from Judaism into Christianity. "The peace of God," "the love of God," "the God of Zion" became intelligible to Christian students under the definition of Love—"God is Love." If any man really and truly believed God, he could never be in fear, he could never commit sin, he could never be unhappy. Do we believe God? No. We do not disbelieve him, and our want of disbelief is so complete as to amount to a kind of intellectual assent to the proposition that there is a God ; but if we believed God our joy would be too

great for time and earth. Still we must maintain the ideal. We expect the preacher for the moment to be the ideal man and to maintain the ideal doctrine ; but no man can fulfil his own prayers, no man can live up to his own sermons. Still there is the ideal. We cannot touch the sun, or lodge in his infinite effulgence, but we can walk in his light and rejoice in his splendor. So with the great ideal God ; we cannot realize it to the full extent of its meaning, or we should ourselves be gods ; but we can behold its effect, we can enjoy its comfort, we can respond to its inspiration. There is a religion in the world that proclaims God—personal, living, near, redeeming. That religion, by the very energy of its declaration, is keeping right the balance that would soon lose its equipoise. Let us be thankful for every testimony of a higher life ; for every man that gives us to know that the earth has a sky above it, and that the little known is meant to be but a syllable towards the whole world unknown. So I welcome every book that enlarges my thought. I do not care to agree with it. Who am I that I should agree with any other man, or any other man agree with me ? What I want is intellectual enlargement, spiritual enthusiasm, a daily baptism of the imagination, continual leading forth into the wonder-spaces where I am filled with an astonishment that must pray and with a rapture that must sing. When any man amongst us writes a book that shows us that things are larger than we have imagined, he is sent of God with a gospel. The gospel never shows us that things are less than we have supposed them to be : the Gospel always shows us that our dream is but a little hint, our highest imagining a dim questioning of things, and that as the heaven is high above the earth, so is God's purpose above our wit and thought.

What did Paul do in the ship ? He cheered the distracted and helpless. Said he, in the twenty-second verse : "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer." That is what Christianity would do in the world : it would make us all glad ; it would have us sing songs in the night time. Christianity would have us regard the raging of the sea with perfect equanimity ; when the sea roars and is troubled Christianity would have us rise and fall with the rhythm of the hurrying tempest. Christianity never said it wished to darken any man's window, silence the singing birds which he had in his house, put out his fire, limit his food, and make his life

into a pain or a fear. When Christianity meets men, it says, "All hail! This is Sabbath day; the bitterness of death is past: be glad." The glad heart can never go far wrong. The great, big soul that guests the angel of joy, that has in it the singing one, can never do anything unworthy. Joy is a protective influence; gladness sends men home to sing their loudest, sweetest song. Christianity is the religion of joy. Who would think it to look upon Christian countenances?—for if there is a dreary-looking set of men on the face of the whole earth, you will find those men in the various places of worship to-day. A more pitiful-looking set of persons it would be impossible for earth and time to produce. What wonder if people run away from us and little children are glad when we shut the gate and are gone for the day? What wonder if all the little folks at home watch the old man totter down the garden path and clang the little iron gate behind him and then feel as if the day of jubilee had come? Why are we not more glad? Why do we not breathe the very spirit of joy wherever we go? In so far as we carry any other spirit with us—I care not how we pray or preach or otherwise profess—we are not lying unto men, we are lying unto God. Faith comes to take away the burden; the mission of Christianity is to destroy night and fear and the accusing voice. Christianity always wants to kill another fatted calf, light another lamp, strike the drum with a stronger force, and increase the music until it affrights the Pharisees and makes the earth a sympathising listener.

What did Paul do in the ship? He blessed the food of men: "Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that we have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. . . . And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all." It is but a little food we need, but the blessing may be immeasurable. You have mistaken this matter of eating and drinking: you thought it was a merely bodily exercise. Eating and drinking are religious acts. When you brake bread this morning, at your table, if you did it in the right spirit, you brake the Lord's body. When you drank to quench your thirst this morning, if you did it in the right spirit, you drank the Lord's blood. We have lost the sacramental idea. We have allowed the world to debase everything we do, and to take out of it dignity and music and hope.

When you washed yourself this morning, you did in symbol what the soul must do in faith—be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Why do we allow everything to be depleted, impoverished, and to have all its holy thought and suggestion torn out of it? Christianity would bless the food of every man; and being so blessed, it becomes the nutritious food. The crust is a feast when Christ breaks it for us; the little table, with room for only two, becomes a great banqueting-board when Jesus lays his hand upon it. There is no poverty, there is no want to them that fear him; the little is much, the bitter is sweet, and the whole occasion is so enlarged and glorified by an invisible but felt Presence, that even the earth becomes none other than the house of God. With Christ in the house, we have blessed bread, a table lighted by the Son, water better than all the wine of all the vineyards of the earth; and when we lay down to sleep, the pillow itself will receive us as with a mother's benediction.

In the last part of the chapter, do we not see, in some sense, a picture of the final salvation of the human race? "The centurion commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." May it be so with us! May no wanderer be lost! It is of little matter how we come as to mere method and circumstance, compared with the great matter of reaching shore, touching land. Some of us will get in with difficulty, but, thank God! we will get in. Some will swim, some will seize boards, others will clutch broken pieces of the ship; but if we only all land! That is my heart's desire and prayer to God. "Would you not like to see some of your enemies drowned?" Not one of them. "Are you willing that all should go into port?" Yes, every soul of man. Some would like to go in under a full sail, with strains of music and singing, songs of triumph floating in the blue and sunny air. But I fancy that our going in will be very much like this escape from the sea—some swimming, some on boards, some on broken pieces of the ship; the old earth-ship broken up, every soul saved; the old vessel gone, but no life lost. That is the inquiry we always make when great catastrophes occur; though we may be sorry that property is destroyed, and that certain temporary relations are shat-

tered, yet, when we know that no sacrifice of life has taken place, we experience a grateful relief. Poor old earth-ship ! We like it, we are friends even of the ship ; but it must go. It was made for a temporary purpose ; it was never meant to stand for ever ; it will be broken up, burned ; it shall pass away, but no life lost. Poor prodigal, thou must be saved ; hopeless man, the Captain wants to save you. We do not want any life lost. Towers and palaces and temples may fall, the earth itself be torn in pieces and destroyed ; but we want every human creature to escape safe to land !

CII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we stand near thee. We stand in the name of Jesus Christ and in the grace of the Cross. We may not see thy glory; but we may look upon thy goodness. Thou hast made all thy goodness pass before us, and truly it is a wondrous procession. The Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. God is love. It is our joy to know that love is at the heart of things. We are not trembling under a great power: we are appealing unto a great love. It shall be well with us. The battle means victory; the running is already completed in covenant; and even now we reach the goal and seize the prize. All things are done and established in the order and decree of God, and we are but carrying out the daily process, coming nearer and nearer to the happy end, closer and closer to the radiant home. All things are settled; the world is saved, and is in the mighty arms of Christ. Jesus, our Saviour, came to seek us, to save us: he can lose none but the son of perdition. Help us to believe in the finished work of Christ; help us to see that there is no accident in his ministry, no difficulty as to the end, but that already his foot is upon the serpent's head, and already the kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Thus would we see the end, and lay hold upon it, and stand in the sanctuary of its completeness, and feel within us the rising of sacred triumph, knowing that the Lord is God, and that in the answer of his fire there is the assured destruction of his foes. We bless thee for every hope we have. This hope is the summer of the soul. Having hope born within us of the Spirit of God, may we purify ourselves even as Christ himself is pure, so that our hope may be no mere sentiment, gratifying a subtle and unexpressed vanity, but a renewing, an invigorating, and a purifying power, that, answering all the music of its light and all the eloquence of its persuasion, we may be found waiting for our Lord, with all industry or with all patience, as he himself may determine. The whole world is thine, —the poor, little, sinful world. It has run away from the centre, it has endeavoured to find a way for itself; to-day it has returned to its Shepherd and its Bishop, and is now, in all spiritual meaning and hope, set amongst the family of the stars to go out no more for ever. For all Christian hope we bless thee. It is our daily inspiration; it is a light from heaven. It operates upon the soul as most tender music; it lifts us above the clouds and causes us to live in heaven. We come to worship God, to bow down before him; to bury our pride and vanity and self-sufficiency; to mourn our sin, to hate it, and to abandon it. We

come to look upon the Saviour in the agony of his soul, in the priesthood of his ministry, in the infinite sacrifice of his suffering, that so looking, we may also believe, casting ourselves in simple and unqualified trust upon a mystery we cannot explain, upon a love which we humbly adore. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for us. It is an answer mightier than the accusation of the enemy ; it is our reply to angry and just law. The work of our Saviour we accept as the grace of God. We pray that we may be sanctified, body, soul, and spirit ; that we may be living temples of the Holy Ghost, without sin, without fear, without pain of heart, wholly cleansed of unbelief and earthliness, and filled with the truth and grace and light of God. Surely to our prayer thou wilt send a great answer. We pray our prayer in the Saviour's name. He takes up our little plea and expands it into his infinite intercession. Saviour of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God, help us every one ; feed us with thy flesh ; quench our thirst with thy blood ; lead us into the mystery beyond all words—" Except a man eat my flesh, and drink my blood, he hath no life in him." We do not know thy meaning ; we would obey thy word. We would find in obedience our peace, and in our acceptance of the mystery of thy sacrifice our present and assured heaven. Physician of man, Healer of all souls, bind up the broken heart, comfort the wounded spirit, speak peaceably to those whose souls are in tumult, and lead out by unexpected ways from difficulties which seem to bar in the pilgrim and to mock his every effort and his every hope. Amen.

Acts xxviii. 1-6.

1. And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

2. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness : for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly : but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

UNREASONING CONCLUSIONS.

THIS is an instance of getting out of one trouble only to get into another. There is a mysterious law of succession in the coming of sorrow and difficulty in human life ; hence the proverb

“ It never rains but it pours.” There is a mystery of grace also in this succession. We do not know the best side of trouble until we have had a great deal of it. One trouble is of no use. You must get into the music of trouble, the rhythm of sorrow, the rise and fall of the melody of discipline. There comes a time in the sufferer’s life when joy would be a kind of vexation to him ; it would be in another key ; it would be, so to say, a kind of foreign or forgotten language. It is marvellous how trouble can sit upon all the chairs in the house as if by right and how it can make the house happy, comfortable with a strange and weird sense of its being there at Heaven’s bidding and under Heaven’s decree and order. It is not so with the first trouble—that always upsets a man ; vexes and irritates him, merely tries his temper, stops the smooth rolling of life’s common machinery ; it exasperates, and frets, and annoys. The second trouble is accepted in rather a better spirit ; then the third comes like an expected guest, and then the door is set wide open, as if a whole procession of black visitors must pass through the hospitable dwelling. “ It is better” —when trouble has wrought out its most sacred mystery—“ to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” It has been pointed out that different nationalities have different salutations. The Greek would say, “ Joy be with you !” The key-note of his salutation was “ Rejoice ! be happy ! be glad ! Joy be to you !” He lived in beauty, he lived in the region of the senses ; he delighted in high art, in high feasting, in all social sensuousness, in the luxury of civilisation. The Hebrew never said so : he spoke in a deeper tone, in a nobler bass ; he said, with mystery in his dark eyes and mystery in the minor key of his voice, “ Peace be with you !” The Hebrew was the man of soul, the man of tragic experience—spiritual and political—the suffering man, the man who had been torn in pieces, hunted as prey upon the mountains, whose nights had been full of the darkness of terror and whose days were but half-lighted by the timid sun. He said nothing of joy : he spoke the deeper word—“ Peace be with you !” So trouble leads us into these deeper mysteries of experience ; it takes away the laughter of childhood, the merry shout, “ Joy be with you !” ; it fills the heart and the mouth with a nobler salutation. Having seen what life is—how deep, how narrow, how full of pain, how fretted and exasperated by a thou-

sand mockeries—it says, “Peace be with you!”—not indifference, not languor, but the reconciliation of all tumults, the great and final end of all controversy and friction, the harmonisation of all laws, fellowships, experiences, and relations; the mystery so deep that men mistake its depth, the mystery of peace. So Jesus Christ, in all his agonies and sorrows, which made his soul “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” said, “My peace I give unto you.” Peace is the greatest, richest, fullest gift of God. May the peace of God, that passeth understanding, keep your hearts and minds, watch over you in critical and gracious guardianship, and bind up all the elements of your manhood, lest they fall out of order and true relation and you be ruined and destroyed! A noble prayer which could be prayed only by him who was cast upon this island and subjected to these successive sorrows.

Here is an instance of the rough judgments which men are always prone to pass upon men. When the viper came out of the heat and fastened on Paul’s hand, the simple Punic people said, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” Alas! how many murderers there would be if we had to judge of sin by apparently penal circumstances! How ready we are to form the rough and ungracious judgment of one another! Who ever failed in business, even in the most honourable way—for there are honourable failures as well as failures dishonourable—without some friends knowing that this very collapse would take place, without their having seen it all the while, and without their deploring it with hypocritical pretence, rejoicing in it all the time, and taking morals from it intended to magnify their own better business faculty and capacity? Who ever pitied the man upon whom the viper fastened? Observers knew that, sooner or later, it would come to this. Wise men have foreseen it all the time; even when they were silent they knew the judgment was coming; they had never spoken about it; they felt quite sure that one day the viper would spring out of the heat and fasten upon the unjust and unrighteous man. Do not make a man a murderer because you thus exhaust in one phrase all possible accusations. Be more discriminate in judgment. Surely no man is quite so bad as that. Surely some who have killed men are not murderers. There is one murderer that is a murderer from the beginning—from the

very first psalm and fibre of him—the devil. Jesus Christ would see in the very worst man something to admire, or praise, or recognise, in a way that would give the bad man another chance or bring upon him the light and warmth of a new and inexplicable hope. There is no man quite so bad as he appears to be, even though the viper be in the very centre of his palm. But some men have no moderation in judgment; they do not look out for the beautiful, the mitigating, the redeeming qualities; they rush at conclusions which sometimes they have to modify, or utterly repudiate. Circumstances are sometimes against men. The venomous beast is upon that man's hand at this moment. For a time even stigmas attach to good names. We have seen the most brilliant of men stigmatised, the viper of a false accusation fastening upon the hand that never did mischief to a human creature. But we are loath to believe this; we are born to believe in each other's wickedness; we like it; it suits the palate. Why should this be so? You have only to charge a man with being a murderer, a liar, a thief, or what you please, and somebody will stand up to say he saw the viper on his hand. I would pray for the spirit that pities the hand, rather than praises the viper; that believeth all things good; that would rather be deceived than willingly accept the ungenerous judgment, the condemning and ruinous accusation. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Yet here, even in this very judgment, so rough and indiscriminating, we have a wondrous mystery, with which we cannot part, except under a sense of great spiritual deprivation. Here is the mystery of intuitive or instructive religion. It would seem as if religion were born in the human mind and heart. The features of this inborn religion are really grand. What are they as suggested by this graphic incident? Here is a sense of a Presence in the universe that means righteousness, honourableness. The heart instinctively says when wrong is done, "This must be punished." Christianity never uproots that intuitive perception, but ennobles it, sanctifies it, attempers it, and perfects it in holy meaning and utility. This is written in the human heart: "Murderers cannot live." Who wrote that law? It is written upon the tablets of the mind by an invisible penman. The universe is against murder. No part of the fair creation was constituted for the accom-

modation of the bad man. Where can he live? Into what quarter of the universe shall he be shut? The universe does not want him; all its beams of light are darts of punishment; its purest, holiest is to him as blackest perdition. We cannot give up the thought that the bad man will one day have the worst of it. That is intuitive religion; that is a good and honest faith. It is the kind of faith that is beyond argument, and yet that is always fortifying itself by innumerable historical instances. The universe would fall to pieces if we could relinquish that doctrine; it would be no longer safe to walk out under the blue heavens, so charged with the infinite weight of the stars. But our hearts tell us that the bad man will get the worst of it: he may escape the sea, he may escape the viper, he may escape the wilderness, he may seem to make fortunes out of other men's ruin; but, at the last, the sword will strike him, and the fire of heaven will utterly destroy his place. We did not need a revelation to tell us that: somehow we felt that if a wall was built out of plumb, it must fall. We learn a great deal from the history of idolatrous and instinctive religions. These so-called barbarians were theologians in their way: they said, "We do not see everything." This was not a spontaneous or extemporaneous thought just struck off at the moment: behind this utterance lay a wonderfully large induction of facts. The Punic people had observed—though unable to speak Greek or Latin in the high and refined sense, which would have relieved them from the stigma of being called barbarians—that there was a Ruling Power; that the Ruling Power was on the side of right; that human life, widely and deeply read, was itself a religion, was itself a revelation. That is the corner-stone of a great argument on the Christian side. Read human life, study human ways, take in the great breadth of human history; do not judge by isolated incidents or solitary facts, but take in what you can of the horizon of things, and though you may not come to say the hated word "God," you will be constrained to say "Mystery," "Secret," "Force," an "Unknowable Quantity," whilst Christian men say "Our Father which art in heaven." We prefer the latter position: it justifies itself to our reason, and it enters our hearts with all the cordiality and sufficiency of grace.

Here is also a point of progress in the religion of these barbarians. They who could not understand a sermon could compre-

hend the treatment of a viper, and reason upon it. They were observant people : they made religious deductions from ordinary facts. " They looked when " Paul should have become inflamed red as fire, or when he should have " fallen down dead suddenly : but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god." What was this ? A direct contradiction of so-called experience. Here was the greater law setting itself in noble sovereignty over the common daily law ; and the people, observing it, paid homage to it. They were a frank people ; they had attained a very high point in education, in being able to shake out of the mind lessons and prejudices which opposed themselves to the startling fact which immediately appealed to their vision. If we could persuade Western nations to act in the same way, we should have no unbelievers in all these Northern and Western quarters. If every viper shaken off the hand proved the nobleness of the character so destroying it, and led to the higher reasoning that such a character is a Divine creation, we should have no controversy amongst us as to many spiritual questions and mysteries. All Christian history may be summed up in this one line : that the Christian hand has always shaken off the viper and flung it into the fire. That is what the Church is always doing ; that is what the individual Christian is always doing ; that is what the growing part, undergoing the process of sanctification, is always doing. It is part of the great original mystery : the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. We belong to that lineage, by grace Divine. The viper is on us now ; the bite is sharp and deep, the poison has touched the red current of the blood ; but, by the grace of Christ, we will shake it off, and it shall be burned and destroyed. Do I speak to some poor sufferer who feels the viper at his heart ? It is not in poor human strength to render the bite innocuous. Is it an unseen viper that is piercing you and poisoning the inner veins of your soul's life ? Then the mystery of deliverance will be as secret, but that mystery can culminate in perfect deliverance from the agony and the sorrow. Flee to the Saviour in humble, earnest crying and prayer. Is it a public viper—a viper clinging to the hand that everybody can see, that even barbarians can look upon and even barbarians can mock ? The Lord will not leave his chosen ones—that is to say, his trusting and loving ones—long in

that misery. Blessed are they whom the viper has seized only by the hand ! It is an external difficulty ; it is a matter that can be dealt with directly and simply. I am more concerned about the viper at the heart—the inner serpent, the venomous beast that is biting the soul. O thou who didst come from Bozrah, clothed with garments dyed, like blood, thou art mighty to save ; tear out this venomous beast and set thy foot upon his head !

CIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy house is full of light. Thou hast called us to be children of the day and not of the night, and to walk as those who love the open day and the bright morning and the sunny place. We would answer that great call in the strength of thine own grace, for of ourselves we love the darkness, and we hide ourselves in vicious concealment ; only by the power of thy grace can we come out into the full daylight, and walk as at midday in the sight of angels and of men. Work in us this great miracle of the love of light. May we dwell in light ; may we be healed by light ; may our whole soul be radiant with the presence Divine. That this may be so, in all the fulness of its meaning, grant unto us now, in answer to eager intercession, the precious gift of the Holy Ghost. He will work in us all the good pleasure of the Divine will ; he will take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. In the Cross he will find deeper mysteries and tenderer compassions than we have yet realised, and in the blood of Christ he will find the cleansing of which every human soul is in need. So then we come to thee to work thine own miracles. Our hands are feeble, our eyes cannot see, our faculties are turned aside in a great perversion—thou alone canst work the miracle of restoration and perfect us in all the purpose of thy wisdom. Thou delightest to hear our prayer, though so poor, so wanting in range of thought and in depth and tenderness of feeling. Thou dost accept it as a struggle, as an endeavour which thou wilt bring to fruition, because of thine own love, and thou dost answer us because all our little prayers are magnified in the great intercession of our one Priest and Saviour. We come to sing our hymn, to unite in noble psalm of adoration and thanksgiving, and to take part in anthems of triumph and ecstasy, so that our souls may no longer be guilty of the sin of dumbness, but may be found uttering themselves in the Divine courts in all solemnity of praise and joyousness of thanksgiving, because thy tender mercies are over all thy works, and thou art spreading daily the table of thy great creation. We have come to read thy word, to see still more deeply into its sacred meaning, to hear with acuter attention all the finest tones of its celestial music, and store the heart with answers to every temptation, and with statutes and precepts which shall guide and uphold our life. We have come to hear thy word in brotherly tones, translated into the sympathy of the day and the speech of the passing time. Into whatsoever speech thy word be translated, may no part of its substance be lost ; may the variety be only

in the expression ; may we find the eternal quantity in the solemn and holy doctrine. May we be abased by thy Gospel messages, and then exalted ; humbled and stripped of every pretence and plea, and then clothed with the riches unsearchable of the grace of Christ Jesus the Lord. Thus may we leave our burdens here, and our darkness, our frailty and our fear, and all our infirmity and littleness, and go out as from the presence of the Lord, with hearts renewed, with shining faces, with hands filled, and with faith enlarged and confirmed. Let thy mercy be given unto each of us according to individual condition and circumstance. Thou dost give impartial blessings, and thou dost not omit to give special benefactions where they are specially needed. Thou knowest the weariness of some, the heart-brokenness of others, the trial of human patience, the assault made upon frail temper ; thou knowest the uncertainties of life ; the continual battle and the nightly disappointment ; thou knowest our whole situation, and all the discipline we have to undergo ; thou knowest our hearts—their weaknesses, all their vulnerable points, and thou knowest the temptations that assail and beset us, like an army intent upon our overthrow. Knowing all these things, thou wilt not withhold from us the blessings special and individual which the struggling and needy heart requires. Keep our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, and our soul from death. Enlarge our spiritual outlook, increase our spiritual riches, confirm our spiritual desires, and satisfy our spiritual aspirations. Then shall the day be full of blessings—a right memorable time, a Sabbath of God in the days of men ; and we shall live in the strength of it many days, and accomplish our pilgrimage with cheerful hearts, with undaunted courage, with sacred and immortal hope. To the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost,—One-Three, Three-One, Equal, Indivisible, United, Personal, Eternal, Redeeming—be all kingdoms and powers, all dominions and glories, all thrones and riches, time without end. Amen.

Acts xxviii. 7-15.

7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius ; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux : to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed :

10. Who also honoured us with many honours ; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

11. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

12. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

13. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium :

and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli :

14. Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days : and so we went toward Rome.

15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns : whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

FIVE REMARKABLE THINGS.

THERE are five remarkable things in this statement. The first is, that Paul should have healed, and not Luke. Luke was a physician ; but he does not mention any healing as having been done by his skill. Paul was a tent-maker and a preacher, and he healed the sick. Many scientific readers have ascribed to Luke great skill in the matter of description, acute precision in observation, and no one has been able to find fault with any statement which Luke has ever made regarding human suffering and healing. Yet Luke healed none. Luke kept the diary ; Luke wrote the journal ; Luke magnified the preacher and the intercessionist and said nothing about his own professional education and talent. This is exactly what is taking place to-day. It is religion that heals : the medicines are grown in God's garden. The physician himself, in proportion as he is a great man, will tell you that however skilful he may be in describing your disease, he has to go out of himself for the remedy that is to mitigate or to heal it. Everything is in Christianity. The doctor does you good in proportion as he leads you out of yourself, and that he can only do in proportion as he is led out of himself. We are healed by God ; we are healed by faith. What men can do for us is of the nature of help. A very gracious and beneficent assistance—an assistance for which we can hardly be too grateful,—but beyond that is the mystery of faith, the miracle of hope, the wonder-working of confidence, the marvel and the mystery of spiritual operation and comfort. Christians are the greatest healers in the world. Christianity is nothing if not a healer. It does not deal with the detail always, but it so nourishes the fountain of life, replenishes and renews the springs of energy, as to touch the particular through the general. If we were Christians, we would not be sufferers ; if we were hidden in God, we should have no disease

in the sense of burden and trouble. The eater would still consume us, the biter would still close his teeth upon us, the black visitant would still darken our dwelling ; but we should have joy in tribulation, we should know that death was abolished, that what was taking place was but a natural sequence, an inevitable process, the end of which was the better life, the brighter day, the sweet home known to us by the mysterious name of heaven. When you take Christianity out of your civilisation you do not know what a vacancy you leave behind. We are so familiar with its presence that we do not acknowledge its necessity ; we are so aware that it is part of the very substance of our life that we do not uncover our heads in the presence of its ineffable dignity. Let us live in the faith that Christianity heals, that Christianity destroys death, that Christianity fills up the grave with flowers, and that all the healing of human disease is a miracle wrought not on earth, but in heaven. Bless the Lord, O my soul, who healeth all my diseases !

The second remarkable thing in this narrative is, that the poorest should have rendered help to the richest. Publius was the first man in the island, and his father " lay sick of a fever." Paul was a prisoner—a shipwrecked prisoner—who had nothing in his hand to give ; who, therefore, from that point of view, was the poorest man in the island ; yet he—the poor, penniless, garmentless Apostle—personally healed the father of the first man of the island. That is what sanctified poverty is always doing. So many mistakes are made about poverty. It is the richest thing in the whole world. It is—rightly accepted and used—about the grandest experience that man can have. I am not speaking of vicious poverty, criminal poverty, or poverty that is brought about by wilfulness and wantonness, but of the greater poverty, the subtle mystery of having nothing, of expressing the hunger and aspiration of contined necessity. Do not pity the poor : pity the rich. What folly is spoken about the poor !—God's chosen ones, the very elect of his household, the crowned ones in his kingdom. Remember, in all these observations I speak about disciplinary poverty ; not thriftless want, not sinful necessity—about that I have nothing good to say. I am speaking of that poignant appeal which Jesus Christ himself said we have always with us. The world would not be worth living in but for its poor people. Life

would be an intolerable monotony but for the sick child, the old man, the halting cripple, the cry at midnight. We want to plaster up the world, and new-stucco it, and call it happy. There is no happiness to be found in that way. So long as a man can pay you out of his hand, he does not touch the mystery of help at all : he must pay you out of himself—out of his soul—in great drops of blood ; a mystery which the languid temperament, the cold mind, can only regard as an exaggeration and a romance. “ The Son of man had not where to lay his head.” What then did he give? Himself! We have not begun to give—it seems impossible for us to give. He gives who gives life. That is what Paul did in the island : he gave life ; virtue went out of him. Christ was magnified in his body by life. Oh for that sacred touch that has resurrection in it, for that warm hand that cannot come near me without healing my disease ! What healing power we might have ! What healing influence you who are poorest amongst us are continually exercising ! You do not know you are called of God. The poor mother has done more for the world than her rich son can ever do. We must not speak of the great men, the princes of this world, those who have it in their power to do so much good. That is false talk ; it is without sense or honesty. The poor people are keeping the world sweet and wholesome. The poorest of the saints of God are chosen rich in faith, and he who has an abundance of faith cannot be poor. He cares not where he lives or what his dinner is : he has meat to eat that the world knoweth not of, and the whole week is one bright, glorious Sabbath day. Yet how the poor misunderstand themselves in this particular ! Some of you have said, in my own hearing : “ Would it were in our power to do more for the Church than we can do ! ” You have mistaken the point altogether. The Church is not a counter, it is an altar ; and by your patience, sacrifice, quiet, silent, beautiful heroism, you may do more for the Church than can be done by the man who has the gift of tongues and the faculty of prophecy. We expect much from the poor : we expect the tenderest tone, the tenderest sympathy, the richest experience ; we expect them to tell us—what strong men can never tell—of the mystery of Divine communion and the miracle of communication with heaven.

The third remarkable thing in this narrative is that the ministry

upon the island was all healing and no preaching. "So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed." That is the glory of the Christian ministry—it can begin anywhere. I wish to say something, in due time, upon the larger ministry. I will not now anticipate myself; enough to point the direction without traversing the ground. Christianity can begin everywhere, anywhere, at any time, and with any man. Christianity has no transformations to make, no dignities to put on, no ceremonies and processes of etiquette through which to pass. Christianity meets men everywhere and says, "All hail! What is your burden, what your necessity, what your sorrow, what your most urgent need?" It will be a long time before some people can have the prejudice cleansed out of them that the church-building is only for distinctively doctrinal and spiritual purposes. The Father's house is for everything good. There is no reason, in the necessity of the case, why this church should not be a hospital, a schoolhouse, a reading-room, a place for music and conversation and instruction in all high and useful knowledge. It is the glory of Christianity that it can begin where I want it to begin. The Church sends men to school to become preachers; I would have the Church send men to hospitals to become doctors, to academies to become musicians, to trades to become honest tradesmen in the world. I would as certainly have a collection for the purpose of apprenticing a youth to a carpenter, as have a collection for sending a man to a religious college. We are too narrow. Find a man in need anywhere and say, "All hail! we want you;" and I am doing God's will as truly in sending an honest-hearted boy with my money to learn a trade, by which he can do good work and through which he can speak good words, as in sending him to be equipped as a minister or as a missionary. All our medical students should be ours, and all our apprentices, in every trade and vocation, should go out from the Church, and all our musicians should be sweet singers in the sanctuary. Poor Church! little-headed, small-handed Church!—living along one little line only and letting humanity go to the devil on the ground of ceremony. Would God I could build a Church after my own heart, and have a place I could work in just as I want to work in it! It should be all for Christ, and every poor soul in the place who wanted a stick to light a fire should

find it in the Church, and every beggar shivering for want of coat or pining for want of bread should find it in the Church. It should be all Church—great, motherly, encompassing, redeeming Church. I would swallow up the State. One day with Paul would do much towards rearranging, redistributing, and enlarging Christian influence. Did Paul not preach then when he healed? Every healing is a sermon; every visit to the poor, paid in the right spirit, is a prayer. Why should we allow men who narrow every definition to lead the sentiment of the Church? Whatever good you do in the name of Christ and for the sake of Christ is a proclamation of Christ; a sermon without words—not spoken, but done like a miracle.

The fourth remarkable thing in this narrative is the grateful response which was made by the islanders. In the tenth verse we read, "Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary." Gratitude is never done. How musically the verse reads! The islanders were not Christians, but the islanders were men, and having received healing at the hands of the Apostle, they honoured the whole little band of the disciples "with many honours." Mark the redundance of the thankfulness! There is always just one more little flower to give, and you must have that. This was a grateful response. It was not a fee that was claimed: it was a benefaction that was conferred under the inspiration of gratitude; and that spirit continues unto this day. If a man does not find his support in the ministry all the support he wants, it is a sign that he ought not to be in it. Is that a hard doctrine? I have reason to believe it, and therefore I do not hesitate to declare it. Every workman will have his wages. Trust the Christian heart. It may come in various ways, but come it will. That there will always be some ungrateful people is true enough, but we must not speak of the exceptions: they must not drag us down to their level. The great human heart is after all a grateful heart, and it will honour with many honours those that try to the best of their ability to do good in any way—not in preaching only, but in private and in divers ways. The honour will come, and the lading with such things as are necessary will take place. This word "necessary" one rather objects to. And yet we accept it, because "necessary" in this connection is a flexible and variable term,

and is not always defined by the receiver, but by the giver. Reviewing my life—and I have passed more than the half of it, and am now in a position to review it with impartiality and without fear—I have to thank God for gratitude not to be explained by myself, but only to be accounted for by Divine inspiration. I look back upon the way in which I have been treated, in little places and in great places and by all sorts of people, and I find this tenth verse in the twenty-eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles to be a piece of genuine human history.

The fifth remarkable thing I find here is the inspiring influence of friendship: “And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.” Reading between the lines, we wonder if Paul’s courage had given way for one little moment. It would seem as if the lion himself might have been affected with momentary depression. We might never have heard of it but for the returning courage. Some men never tell us they have been ill until they tell us that they are quite well again. Then we say, “Have you been in suffering? You did not tell us that you were in low condition of body or mind. We knew nothing about it until you told us you were well again.” One wonders if Paul had passed through a season of depression and fear and discouragement. I hope he had. We should get nearer to him if we felt he had been in the valley. When he was always on the mountain-top and waving a great red banner in the air we were almost afraid of him. He was so high away from our poor level; but if he had seasons of fear when he could only pray in a whisper and only look as if he were half blind, then we can touch him and say, “Brother! Comrade!” It was the habit of the ancients to go out to meet princes—to go away for a mile or two or more and to stand on the road to wait for the incoming great one and to accompany him. The brethren went to where the road forked. They would have gone farther, but not knowing whether they might come by the right road or by the left road, they stood at the point and waited for their prince. When Paul saw them he knew them. How is it that we know some men at once? How is it that we fall almost instantly into common sympathy and masonry and fellowship, though we have never seen the men before in our whole

life? That is the mystery of friendship ; that is the mystery of love. When Paul saw the Christians, who had come out to meet him, up went his hands in sign of adoration and thanksgiving ; and having thanked God, he became a great lion again, full of courage, every fibre attuned, his whole soul toned to its noblest music. "Iron sharpeneth iron ; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." We need human associations, human cheerings and fellowships, kind speeches, terms of recognition, letters that make the house bright and warm. O my brothers ! the day is very short : let us do no unkindness in it, but make it glow with deeds of noble friendship and make it sing with the music of truest Christian love !

CIV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are living upon thy promises. We sing them to our souls and repeat them in all tones and forms until our spirit knows them well, and triumphs in their music, and is rich with their wealth. Thou wilt not permit us to live upon things that are false. Thou dost lead us by him, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, towards the whole truth of God. Little by little the light grows upon our eyes ; word by word comes the great sweet Gospel, which we could not hear all at once because of its vastness and grandeur. Thou dost grant unto us thy truth as we are able to bear it. Thou art always stooping to our littleness and condescending to our weakness, and making us the standard and the measure of thine action. Thou wilt not distress us by thy great power, nor thunder upon us from the infinite heights ; but with all gentleness and whispering tenderness and love, thou wilt come into our hearts and take up thine abode there and speak unto us things concerning Christ, until we become well instructed in the heavenly kingdom and made strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. This is thy way, and it is good ; it is well ; it is best. Thou art not moved by our impatience, but by our true necessity. Thou wilt come as thou dost please, but not to overburden us or blind us with excess of light, but to train us in heavenly ways and teach us heavenly truth and inspire us with heavenly animation. Thou hast made us, and thou knowest the whole mystery of our nature. We are instruments of thy fashioning. Behold ! we spend a life-time in studying ourselves without attaining fulness of wisdom. The generations have been studying themselves, and they died without the knowledge ; and still we are in ardent quest, still pursuing, still inquiring, still comparing issues one with the other, and still our cry is the utterance of ignorance. We cannot tell what we are—mysteries of power, mysteries of weakness ; able to pray, but more willing to blaspheme. We hold ourselves, as it were, in trust from God. We shall be glad to render up our stewardship, for it overweighs and distresses us day by day. We are never sure of our ground—now in triumph, now in despair ; now with both arms locked round the altar in a great grasp of love, and now with both hands wildly serving the devil. Behold ! what is this ? Heaven—hell ; a beginning—an end. We cannot tell at all times, or give account of ourselves in straight words ; but we put ourselves into the keeping of the Lord's Christ—Son of man, Son of God, Victim of the Cross, yet Priest and Sacrifice in one. Save us from the

evils of spiritual impatience. Help us to tarry, to wait as if we were serving, to suffer as if we were triumphing, and in all lowliness of mind may we say that the self has been put down and that God is on the throne of the heart. We would spend our life for thee ; we would know no other master, obey no other orders, walk in no other way than thine. We know this to be the object and desire of our hearts at this moment, but the next moment we shall contradict our own speech. This it is that rends us ; this is the schism in our own heart that fills us with infinite distress. We come to thy word for help. Read it to us thyself ; we cannot spell it, much less pronounce the words ; they chill upon our lips and fall down dead as we speak them. Oh, read the Book, thou who didst write it ! Speak the reading in our hearts' hearing, and we shall be comforted by messages of music spoken to the soul. We have spoiled our few days. We thought they were so few we could surely get through them without spoiling any one, and, lo, the whole of the days are blotted and stained and perverted, and each of them is signed with the red signature of personal and continual guilt. God be merciful unto us, sinners ! Wash us in the sacred blood ; purify us through the ministry of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and make us at the last, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, a glorious Church through the infinite mystery and blessedness of the Cross of Christ. Thou knowest us every one. Leave a blessing in each heart ; give each some new song in thine house ; divide the distressing cloud charged with thunder and storm, and let there be some bright shining of the sun that used to make us glad. Cover up the grave we can never fill ; relight the fire which has been put out and is beyond our power of restoration ; bring back the wanderer who has passed beyond the circuit of our poor prayers ; grant unto the weak, the sick, the dying, those on whose lips the last farewell is forming, comforts, lights, messages from heaven. Be with us during the handful of our remaining days, and help us to make the four-and-twenty hours of each, bright, tender, pure, acceptable unto God. But this we cannot do unless thou dost work in us the miracle of the new heart, the clean heart, and the right spirit. God of the heavens, Glory of all light, and Saviour of all men, hear us, lift us up, give us vision of the invisible and comfort from the heavens ! Amen.

Acts xxviii. 16-29.

16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard : but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

17. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together : and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar ; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you : because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest : for as concerning his sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.

23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging ; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26. Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive :

27. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed ; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THOUGH Paul has been in bonds for some time now, yet he has been so much in the open air and has taken an active part in so many stirring incidents that we have not fully realised his captive condition. Now that he is in Rome, we feel as if he had passed through some dark way, and that a heavy gate had suddenly and ominously closed upon him—a gate iron-bound and iron-riveted, a huge and ponderous door,—the key of which was upon the girle of the young, vain, cruel Nero. We feel now, as we never felt before, that Paul is in very deed a prisoner, a caged eagle, a hero humbled and uncrowned.

“ When we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard.” Let us look at Paul’s position. Kindness was shown to him at the beginning of his sojourn in Rome. “ Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.” Paul was chained to the guard. The soldier was always with him ; and where there was a man there was a congregation. Paul entered upon a new ministry. The soldier was probably changed every day, or at short intervals ; and Paul told his story day by day ; and each soldier, fascinated by such speech as he had never heard before, went and told the story to others, so that presently the Gospel was known through the whole guard. Paul so preached that people must talk about what he had said, not speaking in a way that is so easy to forget, but driving the truth home, striking with a firm hand, speaking with a tone the soul cannot forget. Soldier after soldier went and told the story over again, so that it became quite a hope and prize who was to be the next soldier that was to guard the immortal preacher.

“ It came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together.” There were seven Jewish synagogues in Rome, and Paul called together the chiefs or elders of them. Mark his tact, his courtesy !—the features which made him what he was. Paul pays the chief of his nation deference ; Paul connects himself with the people of his nation ; Paul claims to be still a Jew. “ For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” Paul would not have Christianity regarded as an accident, a new thought, a modern invention, a passing phase of popular thinking or superstition. He said : “ Christianity is Judaism perfected and glorified.” Paul was not the man to treat the ages as separate links. He saw God’s purpose in all the rolling time ; he watched the development of truth and decree and sovereignty day by day, and he saw in Christ a culmination as well as a new beginning—the Ancient of Days and the Child of Bethlehem. So he is still great ; he is never less than grand. One little line—“ for the hope of Israel ”—shows you the current of his mind, the strenuousness of his thought, the vastness of his spiritual comprehension. He says, in effect, “ I am not following a will-o’-the-wisp ; I am not bounding over hill and dale after some new flickering light that may die in a moment. This Christianity is Judaism perfected, illuminated, glorified ; this is the meaning of all the

law and all the prophets, and all the history of ancient time. Fools indeed we are to have traced the root and the trunk and the branches and to have watched the whole growth and then to have turned our back upon the sunny and nutritious fruit." Such men are not easily shaken ; they do not live in a day ; they are not new men every morning, having no relation to their yesterdays. They stand upon great breadths of time ; they take historical views ; their keen far-seeing eyes take in horizons, and are enabled by that great vision to connect what would otherwise be unrelated, incoherent, and bewildering. To the last Paul will act in that spirit ; when he dies, he will die as one who is the last birth of a great and noble life.

Here is an incidental view of the first impression created by Christianity. This sect is everywhere spoken against. A testimony of that kind is invaluable. This is not an accident, but a law. Point me to anything—any man, any thought, any Church—that has come up to supremacy without having had to pass through obloquy, misunderstanding, false criticism, and bitter contempt. The difficulty is that so many people break away during the process. The sect must be everywhere spoken against if ever it is to rule the world. No man comes to immortal renown through the narrow and obscure lane of respectability. That is the lane that leads down to oblivion—a quiet, pretty, inviting lane ; but it ends in nothing. All history is before us, and let history be our witness and our field of evidence. Show me one man in all history, whose name is united with the dead but sceptred monarchs whose spirits still rule us from their urns, who did not pass through exactly the same process as Christ and Paul. That is a matter worth inquiring into ; that is a suggestion which should lead us to consideration, and to prayerful quest into far-reaching omens and meanings. This is not a matter of conjecture. The man who lay down that doctrine may be contradicted in a moment if he is wrong, and overwhelmed by a thousand instances. I have never met one. I have watched, as you have done, many men who were born, as Emerson says—born red and died grey, and nothing more was ever heard of them or known about them. There are men of true respectability, good time-keepers, within narrow limits very admirable persons, who are walking decorously into oblivion. The same is true in the matter of doctrine. What

great truth is there that has not had to fight its way as Paul had to fight his? Even your system of astronomy has its martyrs; even so small and trifling a question as to whether the sun moves, or the earth moves, and the action of each in relation to the other, has its blood-history. We are not confined to matters theological in proof and illustration of this marvellous doctrine: all human history goes in the same direction. How needful then to have men about us who will say, "Fight on, hope on, pray on; weary not in well-doing; persevere; one more prayer, and Heaven comes down; one other stroke, and victory is realised." We cannot do without exhortation any more than we can do without exposition. Great heroic voices that bid us pray again and hope on and preach once more may not be voices that convey much instruction, or are charged with new revelations, but they are needful to sustain and comfort and animate men whose hearts would fail because of the length and weariness of the toilsome way. This is the function of preaching. The preacher is not always to give new heavens and a new earth, a great revelation in every sentence that he utters; but, by shepherdly prayer, tender comfort, friendly monition, brotherly exhortation, he is to comfort, sustain, direct, and help in every way the men who listen to tones more persuasive than argument and to prayers more sustaining than formal reasoning. The sect was everywhere spoken against. Who wonders? Who does not prefer the silvery eagles of Rome to the accursed Cross which has become the badge of Christianity? The Cross has a bad history; this was never in the masonry of respectability; it is a thing to be scorned and spat upon and pointed at with the left hand with disdain. Who wonders that Christianity is everywhere spoken against? It cannot be spoken about with mere respect, any more than Jesus Christ can be honestly spoken about as simply a good man. That doctrine cannot be true—namely: that Jesus was simply a good man. He was God or he was the devil. Christianity does not ask for compliments, for deference due to original power of thinking; nor does it ask to be on nodding terms with men who dream dreams and invent new ways to heaven. Christianity must have all or nothing. You cannot appoint one room in your house for Christianity and say, "This is your chamber; Beelzebub is in the next room, both guests of the same large-minded host." No! Christianity must

have the key of the front door, and of the back door, and of every room in the house, or it cannot take up its abode in the dwelling. It makes the front door a cross and every window a cross, the table a cross and the whole light a cross, and the whole being a sacrifice. It must be everywhere spoken against or everywhere received. This will thin down the congregation very much in every church. Do you know what a Christian is? A burning man—all flame; a man of one thought, one love. Better stand in the foot-prints of the scorner and the unbeliever, than attempt to sit down amongst Christ's people with an indifferent spirit, and a mind that can be operated upon either in this direction or in that, and whose faith is a question to be determined by barometers, or any kind of theological instrument varying with the heat of the air, or the current of the wind, or the condition of things round about. I would that men were either hot or cold, that they would either pray or blaspheme. The only man I have no hope about is the man who is indifferent, who is absolutely without conviction, and who does not know in what direction his feet are moving.

The sect is everywhere spoken against. That is part of the process, on the way to ultimate sovereignty and complete rule. Here we have some idea of Paul's preaching and its issue. "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." It is a solemn thing to have had an offer made from heaven and to have declined the overtures of the Eternal. That will be our position if we turn away from Christianity. We have had the offer of it: man after man called pastor, teacher, spiritual friend, has offered us the Gospel; every man said he was commissioned from heaven to offer it; each voice said it had no other message to deliver; each messenger said he did not invent the terms of his message. We have had the offer; that is something. It has been thundered upon us and whispered to us; in every form and tone of speech, the thing has been pressed upon us. Some have preached as sons of the storm; some have wept their message in our presence, so that we have read it with our eyes rather than heard it with our ears. The old man has come, and in harmless tones pleaded with us; the young man has sprung up, and with all the strength of youth has implored us to accept it. We have had the offer. I have hope of the man who has rejected it in great violence, but

what hope can any heart have of the man who listens to music as if it were noise, and to an offer from the heavens as if it were an invention of the earth? It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for such a man! What did Paul say? The Gentiles will receive it. Then he did not say he would give it up? Never! Unbelief did not discourage Paul; desertion did not daunt Paul; the combined opposition of his countrymen did not take away one spark from the glowing heat which burned in his holy soul. Let that be said for Paul himself.

How characteristic is this expression: "after that Paul had spoken one word." What a word it was! They were going, and he said, as it were, "Stop! one final word"; and that was a word from the prophets. It was not a piece of merely Christian enthusiasm viewed in a merely local and historical light. "I was raised from the dead to make the peroration of this appeal;" but the dead heart cared not for the dead prophet. "After that Paul had spoken one word." How little of it was his own! Line by line from the prophets—only a finer accent his. But last words who can hear; last appeals who can hear, without movements of the soul full with distress and agony? And yet every appeal may be the last, every sermon may be the final discourse. We cannot tell what will be the one word that will close our opportunity. At the best the days are dwindling, the occasion is narrowing, the gate is closing—swaying towards the final position: it is not yet closed. The one word is being spoken to some of us; may we have ears to hear!

CV.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast called us to sing songs in the wilderness. How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land? But thou dost help us. By thy grace dwelling in our hearts and burning there like a sacred flame, we are enabled to sing even at the grave-side, and to triumph over death. There is no wilderness where thou art. Thy presence is heaven; thy touch is security; thy smile is freedom. This we know through Jesus Christ, thy Son, from whom we have all our best intelligence respecting thee; standing beside him, we can call thee "Father"; we can all say with one voice, "Our Father." We can look up unto thee, and expect much from thee, when we stand beside the Cross of Christ. We say, If thou hast given unto us thy Son, what is there which thou canst keep back? Thou hast given all in him. May we think of this with a wise heart, and seize its precious truth with both hands, and live upon that truth as upon the bread which cometh down from heaven. All the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Having him, we have all things—yea, now our spirits are in heaven. Show us more deeply this living truth! We are living upon the clouds; we are building in the dust; we are trying to arrest the wind and make a friend of it: we are in error, and our life is one succession of mistakes, unless we be in the Son of God as the branch is in the vine. Lead us into such sympathy with him as shall amount to identification, so that no one shall know which is the Christian and which the Christ, because of the ineffable purity, the sweet resignation, and the continual obedience of our lives. We would be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect; we would be holy as God the Holy One is holy. In this desire we live. It is so much its own answer; the prayer itself is liberty; the wish uplifts us to the skies. We praise thee for desires that are not earthly, for aspirations that scorn the boundaries of sense. Heaven is our origin declared. In these upliftings of the soul we know our Father, and we say, "This is the image of God and the likeness of the Eternal." We are not children of the dust. Thou hast given us a habitation of clay which thou wilt take down and lay back again where thou didst find it; but the burning fire, the eternal flame, the spirit kindred to thine own, thou wilt also lift up to the source and fountain of its being. Thus are we drawn down with the one hand and lifted up with the other. May the lifting up be greater than the drawing down, that we may be conscious of an upward movement of the soul, a desire that will not be satisfied with the rivers of earth and the

deceptions and vanities of time. Thou art taking us onward mile by mile along the fast-unfolding road. There are more mile-stones behind us than in front of us on this life-journey ; we see the end ; we see the opening grave. Teach us that this is not our rest, that the grave cannot detain the soul, but only our lower selves—the dust gone back to dust. Inspire us with the Spirit of Christ ; fill us with the Apostolic enthusiasm that said, “ To die is gain ” ; then shall our life upon earth be the richer for our anticipations of immortality and our labour more continuous and more complete because of our assured rest. Pity us every one ! We have done what we ought not to have done. The Lord look upon us from the Cross of his Son and publish this day an amnesty, through the righteousness which was magnified on the Cross and the condescension and the pity illustrated there, to all the souls burdened and chain-bound that sigh for liberty. Amen.

Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

TWO YEARS IN ROME.

THIS is an abrupt close. It is not the less suggestive on that account. By this time we ought to be independent of the historian and to be able to write Paul's diary with our own hand. If we have made the most of our opportunities, we ought to be able now to say what Paul is doing every day in the week. There are some friends we need not consult because we know exactly what they would say under the circumstances which constitute our perplexity. They are with us for ever. We know precisely how they would address themselves to every embarrassment. Were the case one in which the least taint of meanness could be found, we could see, though they had been dead these dozen years, how their faces would burn with holy anger. Were we to lay before them some proposition that halted in its logic or that turned almost imperceptibly aside in its morality, we could hear their tones of judgment, direction, and inspiration, and see by the expressive eye where they would cry shame upon us if we yielded one millionth part of a second to the enemy. It is needless to go to them in the flesh and say, “ Such and such are the circumstances ; what would you advise ? ” We know their souls ; they are in us, part

of us ; by a marvellous metempsychosis they have been transformed into us, and they are breathing and burning in the secret tabernacle of our own life. It is so with the Apostle Paul. The historian pays us a compliment in condensing into two little verses the industry of two years in Rome, as if he should say, " You know how the years would be occupied : count the hours, and set down every one of them as an act of industry ; count the days, and see them shining every moment with some new hope, or singing every hour with some new or old but enlarging song." We miss our advantages so much. We seem never to get to know our minister, our friend, our fellow-traveller ; we have to be introduced to one another every time we meet. We have lost the faculty of observation. We ought not now—having studied the Acts of the Apostles verse by verse these two years and more gone, every Sunday morning in this house—we ought not now to be ignorant of how Paul would spend his two years. He has shown us his whole plan and scheme. You know where to find him—within the shadow of the Cross ; in what spirit he will be working—the spirit of aspiration and self-sacrifice ; with what hope he will be serving—the hope of saving some. A prisoner who has a case on appeal—having reached the city where the case is to be heard and having two years to spend before the case will come on—how will he occupy himself during that period of waiting ? If you inquire about a stranger, you will say, " He ought to be well prepared when the case does come on ; he will spend his time in consulting the wisest authorities ; there will be nothing wanting in his case ; having all that time upon his hands, he will revise every point, reconstruct the whole, examine every link in the chain ; and when Nero throws open the door of the court and says he is ready, the prisoner will also be ready with perfectness of preparation." Is Paul occupied in getting up his case ? Read the thirty-first verse : " Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." At the last as at the first,—just the same. The first is the last, the last is the first, in all great personalities, in all infinite oaths and vows. He is not dying in those verses ; he will succeed in his appeal, if the appeal be ever heard. Probably the appeal will never come on ; should it come on, the respondents may not appear, and the case may be dismissed. Paul will certainly leave Rome this time,

though he will be seized afterwards and brought back on another charge ; and a little way beyond the city gates the gleaming sword will fall upon his neck and sever from him his head. But that crisis is not represented in those two verses. Paul is waiting : and waiting to him at Athens meant preaching ; waiting in Rome means preaching. Holiday-taking means evangelisation in the case of a man who lived to die and who was never content unless the altar fire was burning up all that he counted dear in this present life. But in other cities Paul went about finding opportunities, opening doors and boldly entering in. Is he doing that now during those two years in Rome? Observe the construction of the sentence and make your own inference. " Paul dwelt "— Paul " received all that came in unto him." That is not the old speech ; it was not customary for Paul to be described in passive moods. He was always active, energetic, aggressive, almost violent, almost mad ; now he " receives all that come in unto him." An incidental and grammatical way of indicating a very solemn fact : Paul was in prison ; Paul could not go where he himself would choose. He had a lodging—probably paid for him by kind friends,—but he was bound to the soldier, and he could only receive the congregations that came to him. He could not now stand up in public places and make his own opportunity and create his own great responsibility : he was a prisoner-preacher, and could only expound the kingdom to the congregations that voluntarily came to him to hear what he had to say.

But Paul occupied his two years in Rome in doing something more than preaching. He would have been but a name to-day had he not occupied considerable portions of the term of his imprisonment in writing his immortal epistles. Writing lives. You cannot tell where a scrap of paper may be found again. Only a few can ever hear the living voice. Though a man should preach to thousands for forty or fifty years regularly, a very small portion of the human race can have come under the ministry of his voice ; but the writing lives, waits, travels, represents him in some small degree ; is a kind of body in which his thought-life lives for ever. What should we have known of Paul but for the Epistles? The Epistles may be said, in some considerable sense, to have created the theology of the Church. How wonderful that we should have in the Gospels but a narrative—a narrative in which some persons

can find discrepancies and incoherences ; a narrative at the best full of gaps and disappointments, pausing where we want it to flow on like a river, stopping when our excitement is agony, and in the Epistles should have but a few letters. This is Divine ; there is no scheme in this, or plan, or long-headed foresight ; this is God's nature, God's method ; this is the glory of heavenly truth. Impostors write elaborate systems, watch the relation of parts, the distribution and proportion of what they are about ; labour at their work so as to defy the critic. But in this New Testament—why, there is no wild boar of an unbeliever who has not imagined himself capable of rushing through the Book and crushing it under his broad feet. This is God's glorious way—a little narrative, a beautiful parable, a sudden miracle, an outgoing and ejaculation of strength that startles the ignorant and the undevout, not being in harmony with the Infinite, to whom there can be no surprise, and a few letters written to scattered and persecuted believers. These are our documents ; they have been torn, cut, proscribed, burned, damned ; but they lift themselves up again and say, " Why do the heathen rage ?" They are still with us, our sweetest comfort, bread that our hunger longs for, richest when we are poorest, gardens blooming and burning upon graves like the bush that enshrined the God of Abraham.

During the first year of his imprisonment at Rome, Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. What an insight it will give us into his life at Rome if we can have a peep into that letter ! We know that Paul will tell the Philippians everything, because they loved him so much, and gave him so much, and lived in him and he in them. So if we can get hold of that letter to Philippi, we shall not need Luke to write down for us, after the fashion of a diary, what the tireless worker was doing. The letter is at hand ! Remember the writer is at Rome, may never leave it : may be slain in the city. Open the letter, and give us a word or two from it ! In the twelfth verse we read : " I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me"—he makes nothing of them where we should have made a great whine and moan—" have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." He never leaves his subject ; he had no outside engagements ; in prison or out of prison, on the sea or in the city, Paul was occupied with one theme, which he called " the gospel." Read

another line from the letter if you can—read the twenty-eighth verse : “ in nothing terrified by your adversaries.” He speaks to the Philippians as if they were in prison ; the encouragement comes from the man with whom we were about to sympathise. But he has suffered so much now that he has come to see the other side of the tragedy. It is possible to suffer so much, and to accept the suffering in the right spirit, that really the sorrow becomes the beginning of truest joy. So Paul, figuratively speaking, lifts up his head again, gives the chain another lurch as he lays the bound hand upon the paper, and says : “ In nothing terrified by your adversaries. . . . For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Why, he might have been liberated. Whilst he was writing this he was feeling the burden of the chain.

Can we have another line from the letter? Take the fourth verse of the fourth chapter : “ Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.” When we opened the letter we said : “ Where is there a man amongst us with voice plaintive enough to read the minor music?” We quieted ourselves into a deeper peace that we might listen to the voice of the man whose life was one long sorrow ; and when we came to the very third verse of the letter—speaking of it in its modern form—we heard the man say, “ I thank.” This is how we are disappointed in our expectations. He is the only cheerful man in the company ; he gives the key-note of the song ; he says, “ I have seen all the black sea, all the deep waters ; I have seen all the devil can do, and after all he is a poor, poor enemy ; a mean foe, with a sword all handle, and with an aim of a blind man.” Was all this merely sentiment? Was there anything like substance under it? Was this the foam which a child can make in a pool, or was it the foam that is found upon great billows, infinite volumes of water? Read Philippians i. 21, and you will find the basis-line upon which the whole is built : “ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That reads like logic ; there is the substance and sinuousness of reason about it. He uses reason : he says, “ I am in a strait betwixt two—fear ye the appeal may go against me?” Not a word about the appeal—“ I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better : nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for

you." There is not a word about the appeal ; there is no reference to Nero, young fiend ! The only reference is to Christ and to the Church. Was there not great basis of doctrine under all this high sentiment ? Let us read in the second chapter from the fifth verse to the eleventh—a passage which Paul himself alone could read in the right tone. This is a prisoner, and this is the prisoner's exhortation : " Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus : who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." That is the Christian theology ; that is the rock on which the Church is built. But was Paul speaking after the manner of a man who had counted the cost of this ? Did he really know what he was doing ? Was he in very deed quite sane ? Read the third chapter from the seventh verse to the eleventh : " What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count "—he was a reckoner ; he was not going without book and pencil—" Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith : that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." But was he one of those men who had nothing to lose ? Hear him in the same third chapter : " If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee ; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church ;

touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." In quoting those passages and dwelling mentally upon them, always remember the writer and the writer's circumstances, and thus the letter will be multiplied a thousandfold in meaning and in influence. Reading this letter to the Philippians, I have no hesitation in saying that men with such views cannot be in prison. The views themselves are like a great firmament. A man who has great ideas never can be in prison, or in narrow circumstances, or in poverty, or in pain ; he lives in another world ; he has bread to eat that the world knoweth not of. Such men cannot want. Paul says in the eleventh verse of the fourth chapter, " Not that I speak in respect of want." They had sent him something, and when he opened the little parcels out, he said, " Your care of me hath flourished again. . . . Not that I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." It is only for a moment ; I tarry but a night ; I shall be gone in the morning. " I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Nero is a poor man, compared with his prisoner. Such men cannot die ; when the body dies, they are lifted above the pain by great convictions and great hopes. " Brethren," said Paul, " be followers together of me. . . . For our conversation [or our citizenship] is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our viie [or common] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Ask a child going home if he is sorry to go ; ask the friend, who is anxiously awaiting the coming of the completing heart, whether, as the time draws near, the pain of sorrow deepens. No more can the Christian die ; he has to speak of death as men speak a foreign tongue ; there is an accent of strangeness in the very utterance of the word. Death is abolished ; death is swallowed up in victory ; death is gain.

Do you admire Paul in these circumstances? Do you say, " This is heroism, this is grandeur ; this is a man the world ought to remember with gratitude" ? Do you know how he came to be the man you admire ? We shall lose much if we admire the ser-

vant and forget the Master. Paul was only Paul because Christ was Christ : " I am the Vine, ye are the branches. . . . Without me ye can do nothing." We must not lose sight of the Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God. We admire Paul ; we uncover our heads before him ; we say, " This is moral majesty." What made it ? The Cross. When Paul receives our homage and acknowledges it, he points us in one direction, and says, " God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." If the Cross makes such men, preach it : it is the eternal doctrine.

CVI.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art good unto us in Jesus Christ thy Son with eternal and unmeasurable goodness. We think we see it all, and, behold, we see but a little part thereof. Who can see, or search out, the Almighty unto perfection? Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. We bless thee for this infinity of goodness; its very grandeur overpowers us; its very sublimity makes us pray. We thank thee that we are in the house dedicated to the proclamation of this infinite goodness. This house of thine is better than any house of ours; it is our Father's house; it is all good houses in one—glorified into a centre of vital fellowship and immortal hope. From this great height we see the sun rise; we behold the proofs of its coming, and we are assured that the whole earth shall be filled with light and that the morning glory shall chase every shadow away. Grant unto us bright visions to-day. May we see clouds shaping themselves into radiant gates opening upon infinite mornings and summers. May we see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. Then shall we know that all things are made secure in him. We shall not be without a centre, or a corner-stone, or a binding personality; but all things shall spring out of the Son of man and return to him and receive their glory from him, and we shall know the mystery which hath centred in the living Christ, the living kingdom of God. Uplift our minds to great eminence; broaden and heighten our understanding; send upon us the power of unutterable thought that shall make us dumb with a sense of sublimity and blind us with tears expressive of unworthiness and penitence. Thou givest great things; to-day give us great thinkings, great outlooks, great hopes and certainties of faith, so that to-day we may begin the better summer, the great brightness of the soul, the glory of the upper world that shall express itself in the abundance of a great harvest. We pray for one another. Thou dost regard the prayers that are intercessions, the cryings inspired by love and upheld by faith. We pray for the weary man that his strength may daily return; for the sated and outworn man that he may see such change of life and all the purpose of his being as shall create within him new appetences, higher, godlier desires, so that he may begin again and forget his satiety in a new and sacred hunger. We pray for the man who feels in himself the down-going of the body, who has lost the faith and force of earlier time and who is conscious of a decay he cannot express in terms; the Lord send him reviving of spirit—that

quickening and certitude of hope which can impart strength to the fainting heart. We pray for those whose purpose is good, but whose power of execution is small; whose veneration is high, but who fail to carry out that which is noblest in worship in that which is purest in sacrifice. The Lord look upon us every one, from every land speaking every language; whatsoever may be our estate and condition, may we know that we are enclosed by the same firmament of light, breathed upon by the same spirit of vitality, fed and nourished by roots which thou thyself hast made to grow. Grant us thy peace, grant us thy light; banish our sin as thou dost banish darkness by the dawn. Send us help from the sanctuary: even when faint, may we be pursuing; when laid down in the dust and the sword of God hanging above us, may we have the faith which says, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Lead us down the few remaining miles, through the few green lanes and blossoming places that lie between us and the grave, up a steep or two and across some highland, and then gently down into the valley at whose other end there is no gate opening upon this world, but a great door opening upon a better; and may we as we pass through that portal be enabled to say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am. I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus redeemed me and washed me in his precious blood. I die to live O death, where is thy sting?" Amen.

Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

APOSTOLIC COMMUNICATIONS.

WE are now inquiring how Paul spent the two whole years which he remained in Rome awaiting the result of the appeal which he had made to Cæsar. We have read the general words: "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." We have not felt satisfied with that general statement, and therefore we ventured to inquire somewhat into the detail of the Apostolic labour in Rome. We found, by the help of the Epistles and by the assistance of learned men, that during his two years' residence in Rome Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, the letter to the Colossians, with its postscript note to Philemon, and also the letter to the Ephesians. No reference is made to those epistolary and im-

mortal labours in the concluding verses of the Acts of the Apostles ; we simply have a summary given in the words just quoted : " Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." Not a word is said about the letters ; yet the letters constitute this day the corner-stones of all Christian theology. If we could see the letters, we have said, we should discover something respecting the man. We have looked into the Epistle to the Philippians ; let us look into the Epistle to the Ephesians. In the third chapter of that epistle and the first verse, he describes himself as " Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." In the fourth chapter of the same epistle and the first verse, he describes himself as " the prisoner of the Lord." In the sixth chapter and the twentieth verse, he represents himself as " an ambassador in bonds." He thus speaks of his chain and yet does not speak of it ; he uses it for another purpose than merely to describe it. So much depends upon the emphasis, which is of course lost in reading the writing of another man. He is a prisoner, but he is " the prisoner of Jesus Christ"; he is a prisoner, but he is " the prisoner of the Lord"; he is in bonds, but he is " an ambassador"—a king's agent, a man sent with a seal and with an authority. This is the way in which to use a chain, a sign of degradation, an infirmity of any kind, whether of the flesh, or of the spirit, or of the estate ; whether it be bodily weakness, whether it be penury, poverty, difficulty—embarrassment of any kind : the way to use it is to attach it to the infinite name and power and grace. The chain would be very heavy if we could not hook it on at one end to the infinite strength of God. Paul does not whine about himself being a prisoner, a captive, a bondsman, a sufferer : he acknowledges the chain, but he says, " It is the Lord's chain." He is not a prisoner of Cæsar, but a prisoner of Christ. Thus by using great names and yielding himself to the inspiration of great thoughts, he shakes off the chain and stands up in Divine and illimitable liberty. That is the way to use Christian faith and to turn Christian doctrine to practical advantage. We dissociate ourselves from the current of power, from the streams of grace, yea, from the great Fountain of sustenance and comfort, and then mourn like lost things in the wilderness, and say, adding lies to ingratitude, " The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious." The sweet Gospel coming up from

Rome, the tender message sent by the Apostle's voice and hand, we have before us. There is the chain, there is your infirmity ; no mistake about the thorn in the flesh, no mistake about your poverty, embarrassment, and difficulty in life ; no mistake either about the temptations that assail the sanctuary of the soul ; but all things must be sanctified by the word of God and prayer, and the Lord's place in the discipline and education and final perfecting of human life must be adoringly acknowledged and must be accepted as the one inspiration which alone can bear life's burdens and sustain patiently life's distressing mysteries.

But what a shepherd's heart had Paul ! His heart seems to spread itself right out in his letters to the Philippians, the Ephesians, and the Colossians. Look at his care of souls : Ephesians i. 16-23 ; there he says : " I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." What would he that the Ephesian Christians should have ? " The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God " ; he would have " the eyes of their understanding enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of Christ's calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to them-ward who believe." How the sentences roll from his eloquent tongue when he begins to speak of the " Father of glory," and the " God of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the grace of Heaven ! How language is lifted up into new dignities and made to assume the very majesty of thought ! Paul's shepherdly heart created great shepherdly expressions. He asked no mean gifts for the Christian soul, but all heaven's riches. When we ask mean things, we do not pray ; our request only becomes prayer when we claim the heavens. A mean prayer is not a prayer.

Then his care for the Church as a whole. In Ephesians iv. 32, he seems to sum up his desires in the words : " And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." He lays an infinite line even upon social relations, differences, and controversies, and rules them into order by the very grandeur of his appeal. Did any other apostle ever use the word " tender-hearted " ? It is not a word : it is a speech, it is a poem, it is a theology. Yet people have admired the Apostle's logic as if at the expense of his won-

drous graciousness. My own feeling is, as a student of the Pauline life and doctrine, that none could love like Paul.

Not only have we care of souls and care for the Church as a whole, but we have care for the family. Not one member of the household is omitted : "Husbands, love your wives" ; "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" ; "Children, obey your parents" ; "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters" ; "Masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening : knowing that your Master also is in heaven ; neither is there respect of persons with him." What a bishop's heart ! what an illustration of Christianity ! This religion takes care of us all ; it will not omit one from its great prayer. The poor should know this, and the so-called working-man, and all persons who are in distress or are at a disadvantage ; the weak and the lonely, the little child and the old man—Christianity would gather all within its great arms and bless the whole world with peace and hope. Learn from the prayers of Paul what Christianity is always seeking to do.

Paul also wrote the Epistle to the Colossians during his imprisonment at Rome. In that letter he uses an appeal full of tenderness. In the very last line of the letter, he puts in a sentence of three words : "Remember my bonds." "Remember my bonds"—it was enough. A word is enough to those whose hearts are in right tune and who keep themselves abreast of the information which the history of the Church daily supplies. How did the great Apostle regard his fellow-labourers ? Did he so tower above them as to be unconscious of their existence ? Read Colossians iv. 10 : "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, if he come unto you, receive him." You remember the controversy with John Mark ; you remember Paul's welcome to the young man at a given time in the Apostolic history ; and now, as the day is wearing westward, Paul says, "And Marcus, if he come unto you, receive him." Then (twelfth verse), "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring"—hotly, burningly, and—"fervently for you in prayers." And what was the burden of his prayers ? Can they be summed up in one pregnant sentence ? Yes : "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Then in the fourteenth verse, "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." Paul did not

forget anybody ; Paul was looking when persons thought his eyes were closed. No touch of a gentle hand ever escaped his notice, who stands next to Christ in the wisdom and penetration of his love. And if the servant does not forget, can he forget who is Master? The Lord is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love. You praise the minuteness of Paul's recollection. Paul shone with a borrowed light. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, he will remember who visited him, who gave him drink when he was in thirst, food when he was in hunger, and rest when he was weary. Admire Paul, repeat with glowing emphasis everything that lifts up his memory as with the breadth of an inspiration ; but remember that Paul himself lay down in humblest depths of lowliness before Another, and said that Other was King : " I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Paul also wrote the letter to Philemon. That letter was a kind of postscript to the letter to the Church at Colosse. It reveals a great deal, though in comparatively few words ; it shows what a slave-owner's power was in ancient days. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon. Philemon could have thrown him into the water, and there was no law to ask what had become of the slave. But Onesimus had been freed by the Apostle Paul during his two years' imprisonment at Rome, and Paul would do nothing without the permission of Philemon ; but he entreats Philemon as " Paul the aged." Cunning writer ! cunning user of words ! He was not " Paul the aged " when labour was to be done, when suffering was to be undergone, when tyrants were to be faced ; when lions were to be fought, he was Paul the immortal ; but when a slave was to be reinstated, taken back in the old house, Paul thought that if he represented himself as an old man, it would have a happy effect upon the sensibilities of Philemon. Paul seemed to say, " You can use my circumstances in any way that will help a good cause : call me rich or poor, describe me under any names and titles you please that represent the actual facts of the case, providing I can soften human stubbornness, or make the way of a fellow-creature broader and easier in life." I do not know that

Paul would have cared to have been called "Paul the aged." He looked very old sometimes; but at the touch of duty, at the sight of a new opportunity, under the spell of an awakened memory, he sprang into fire again—young, lithe, strong, invincible. Yet he is willing to describe himself as Paul the aged, because that might count for something and moisten the eyes of Philemon. Talk about the equality of men, and the harmonisation of classes, and the over-getting of social difficulties; read the seventeenth verse of the letter to Philemon: "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself." This is said about a run-away, penitent slave! Why, he could not have given a nobler introduction to Cæsar himself had Cæsar been going in the direction of Philemon's dwelling-place. "Receive him as myself"—what a delicate tribute that to old hospitalities and comradeships, to morning prayers and evening talks! "Receive him as myself"—I remember how I used to be received, how the door was pushed back upon its hinges almost with anger that it was a door that could be construed into separating me from the house; I remember the warmth, the old talk, the genuine love, the free confidence—receive Onesimus as if he were Paul. These are the eternal miracles of Christianity, these the marvels that make men open their eyes in unutterable astonishment. This is what Christianity would do to-day: bring back every man that had wronged you, and make him say, "I was wrong, pity me"; bring back every wanderer and reconstruct the household circle. Christianity harmonises the classes, not by dragging any class down, but by lifting all classes up. How much can be put into a postscript! This little note was written for the purpose of introducing a slave to his master. Paul said, with the audacity of an invincible faith, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account"—a man who had not where to lay his head! But he knew he could pay all such obligations as that: "I Paul have written it with mine own hand"—as if he had taken the pen out of the fingers of the amanuensis and had written this little piece himself—"I Paul have written it with mine own hand; I will repay it"—pay a slave's debt! Then comes the touch of closest love—with a touch also of righteousness in it,—"Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides." Yes, these are the great debts that exist between man and man—

not a debt of gold, as much of which can be put in one scale as in the other so that both shall be held in equipoise, but "thou owest unto me even thine own self." These are the debts which people owe to the great authors, and the great thinkers, and the true preachers of the day—they owe themselves. They never knew they were men till they were touched by fire from heaven, until they were reminded of their true quality by a voice inspired. "Thou owest unto me even thine own self"—by the grace of God; I have prayed thee out of despair into hope; I have called thee out of weariness into strength; I have led thee from darkness to light; take it back: if he owe anything, call it my debt: I will put that right; but if we do make a balance sheet, I will write one line on the other side—"Thyself."

These are the letters; is the writer a fanatic? I will believe it when fanatics reason as he does. Is he a self-seeker? I will believe it when self-seekers suffer as he did. When you want to know what Christians are, do not look at us, but look at Paul. We ought to follow him as he followed Christ: he told us expressively to do so; but we dare not say, "Look upon us and behold Christianity"; but we dare say, "Read Paul's life every line; study it night and day the year round; read his letters sentence by sentence; watch his endurances, sacrifices, activities; sum him up into the real total of quality and power, and look at him, and by his character and service we will risk the Christian controversy." How he taught the doctrine of forgiveness! Why, that is the supreme doctrine of Christianity. If you have never forgiven anybody, you are not a Christian; if you have not forgiven everybody, you are not a Christian. In order to complete the work of forgiveness, there must be consent upon the other side; there must also be penitence upon the other side, where wrong has been done. Still we are called to the spirit of forgiveness, and if we ask why we should forgive, the answer is, "Because we have been forgiven." If any man can stand up and say, "I have no desire to be forgiven, I have nothing for which to be forgiven; I am whiter than the snow, purer than the light, taintless as the morning new-born in heaven," we have no speech to make to him; but if he stand in common clay on our footing, and know that he has wronged everybody that he ever came in contact with in some form or other in word, or thought, or deed—if he say, "I am a

sinner, but God has forgiven me," Paul no sooner hears him say that than he adds, "Then forgive as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

I know not what agnosticism may teach, or what socialism may propagate and proclaim, or what atheism may have to say to the ages; but, oh, it will have to say more than I have ever heard of it saying before it silence this transcendent music or put to flight this radiant and healing angel of Christianity.

CVII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art our refuge and strength. They are strong who live in God ; they are immortal who touch thine eternity with faith and love and hope. They cannot die : the sword cannot cut them to their destruction, nor can they be blown away by the great wind, nor can the lion devour them. Behold, they are hidden in God's pavilion, and under the shadow of the wings Divine do they put their trust. We bless thee for the great strong ones who have led the way. We love their names ; we love to think of their wonderful story and to read it until our hearts glow with the fire which made them hot. May we follow them as they followed Christ ! May our hold upon Christ be complete ! We do not now desire only to touch him : we would that he might dwell in us, abide with us, take up His abode with us, sup with us in lifelong festival. This desire is thy creation. This desire is not our own by origin, but it is now our own by adoption and conviction, and by all the delight that flows from its possession. Behold, this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts. Fill us with this desire ; may it be the supreme wish of our soul. Then shall it become its own answer, and the whole soul shall be filled with the light of God. We bless thee for all words that call us upward ; we would answer all the challenges that draw our souls towards greater liberty and purer light. We know that these challenges are the voice of God in the soul. We bless thee that we are no longer deaf to thy calls. We hear them now as we never heard them before—not only their great tones, telling of thy majesty, but their gentle whisperings, breathing the very tenderness of thy love. Blessed are they whose ears can hear, whose faculties are not dead, but are alive with prayer and burning with expectation. Let thy word be unto us various as the need of our life. Thine is an infinite word, and truly ours is an infinite necessity. Let thy word come to us according as we are able to bear it. We expect more from it ; it is a great word, and no man hath ventured to name it, nor can the tongue of man tell it, or the heart of man conceive it. Thou wilt surprise us with greater revelations ; thou wilt astonish the eye with light ; thou wilt make the heart fill itself with reverent amazement in gazing upon the wonders of thy love. Yet the darkness is thine as well as the light. Thou hast a purpose in keeping us ignorant a while. We are growing even in the darkness ; we are preparing even when we are not being surprised ; the quietness is a mission ; the standing still is progress ; the waiting for God is the winning of a battle. Dry our tears when we dare not touch them

with our own hand ; speak comfortably to us when the affliction is too sore ; make our bed ; give us a song in the night time ; cause the springs of water to burst forth when our thirst is hottest ; lead us by the way that is right ; never explain thyself to us, but fill us with thy love. The Lord's mercy be brighter than the summer light ; the Lord's word come to us with the pomp of its own eternity and with the condescension of its infinite friendliness. Fill the house with thy glory. Let the angels all come ; let the spirits of the just made perfect have some relation to us which we can, how dimly soever, realise ; and may we feel that we are not orphans, waifs, lost things blown by the heedless wind, but part of the whole family in heaven and on earth.

We pray this prayer at the Cross, and at the Cross we tarry till the answer come. Amen.

Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

A RETROSPECT AND A PROSPECT.

FOR further light upon the fate of the Apostle Paul, we must be indebted to the labours of learned inquirers. There are men who have made a special study of this subject, and to them we must look for fact and guidance. In the year 63 Paul was released, and returned to the East to continue his evangelistic and apostolic work. In July, 64, a great fire occurred at Rome, the fire being enkindled by the emperor himself, according to the testimony of the most learned historians and witnesses, but falsely charged upon the Christians. A great anti-Christian persecution thereupon arose. Christians were scattered everywhere ; many were arrested and slain. Some think that the Apostle Paul visited the Britannic Isles, and that the great cathedral church of London—St. Paul's—points to that fact. His name would certainly be well known in England. Soldiers who had guarded him at Rome were drafted to London, Chester, York, and other military centres in England, and they could not but speak of the most illustrious prisoner ever given to their charge. About these movements we have no certain record. Paul was probably apprehended at Ephesus and conveyed to Rome, where he wrote his last letter, the Second

Epistle to Timothy—wrote it with his dying hand. It is something to have that last letter. It reads like the summary of a lifetime ; it reads, too, like a will. A will !—what had the Apostle to leave ? To that letter we must turn for distinct information regarding our saintly hero. The days are few and solemn now ; the hour of home-going is now chiming. We had better listen to him now, for presently the voice will cease. He knew that he was writing as a dying man. In chapter iv. ver. 6 of the letter he says, “ I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand ”—“ I am bound like a thing that is going to be laid upon the fire : my limbs are bound to one another ; my arms are lashed round my body with iron hoops—I am just waiting to be flung.” What will he say now to a young minister ? He will frighten the young man ; he will utterly appal the rising youth who is supposed to be nearest to him and to have some kind of right to his mantle. Surely he will adopt another tone : he would hide the afflictions, say as little as possible about them, and would endeavour to allure rather by tender promise the young man who is to succeed him in the Apostolic function.

Even whilst the shadows were gathering around our hero he had a clear view of what he had done. In the seventh verse of the fourth chapter he says, “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” What an epitaph ! Truly we ourselves are witnesses of all these things. We could not have come upon this testimony from the outside with any familiarity or sympathy or recognition of the infinite scope and pathos of its meaning ; but coming to it from our study of the whole record, having been with the Apostle night and day and seen him month after month in the great labour, we feel that he has at last selected the very words which most profoundly and most graphically describe the wonderful course through which he has passed. That is something. Were we to come upon a text like this from the outside, we might call it boastful, self-conscious, deeply dyed with the spirit of egotism ; but when we come upon it along the historical line, when we know the man in and out—intellectually, spiritually—when we understand somewhat of his genius, and have felt the wonderfulness of his gracious temper, and have seen the long continuance of his inexhaustible patience, we feel that this is an inspired summary, that it is God that speaks rather than the

mere man himself. We can testify he has well fought a good fight. He never shrank away from the contest ; he was never wanting when the opportunity shaped itself into a crisis ; he never said, " Pity me and let the blows be fewer and weaker " ; he never asked for quarter ; he will die a victor. You cannot kill such men !

Best of all, he says, " I have kept the faith." That explains all the rest. But for the faith, the fighting would have been a squabble, a controversy without meaning, a conflict without dignity ; the course would have been sentimental, romantic, extravagant, from the worldly point of view absurd ; but having kept the faith, the fight is lifted up into a Divine battle, and the course takes rank with the movements of the planets—an infinite sweep, full of majesty, full of light. We cannot fight, or run, or do anything good and worthy except in proportion as we keep the faith. The courage is not in the hand ; it is in the inner being. The explanation of life is not in circumstances ; it is within that mysterious thing you call your self—a holy of holies into which even you cannot critically enter : you can only adoringly and wonderingly abide. Without the faith we may have huge pretensions, great and rushing cloud for a time, enthusiasm that looks as if it would last, but which really cannot last because of want of connection with Divine fountains and energies. Lord, increase our faith ; our grip of doctrine do thou make stronger, our love of truth purer, our insight almost like thine own omniscience. This is how heroes die.

Then Paul had not only a retrospect, but a prospect. Heaven seemed to come down to meet him : " Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . shall give me." This world is not enough ; the time comes when we want to lay hold upon another. This is the marvellous action of something within us which we cannot define, but which, being defined for us, we can realise, and say, " You have used the right word ; you have put into articulate expression what I have been trying to say ever since I was born." That is what inspiration does, and that is how inspiration proves itself to be of heaven. It interprets us to ourselves ; it finds us opening a kind of heart-mouth, trying to say something which we cannot say, and it then tells us the word we are wanting to utter, and which the moment we hear we

recognise. We never could have found it, but being found for us, we say, "This is none other than the gift of God." So we have a supernatural language, a wonderful set of words which must be extremely foolish to people who do not live along the line which must necessarily complete itself in their meaning and brightness. Wonderful words they are!—"crown of righteousness"; "white linen of the saints"; "palms of victory"; "heaven"; "home"; "New Jerusalem"; a "mountain that may not be touched," "Zion" by name; "infinite"; "everlasting." We do not use these words in the market-place. No, but the market-place is a small corner; it is hardly in the universe at all; it is only a little piece of the little world in which it is a speck, or is recognised by a mere name. But there comes a time in life when we want a new language—great language: crowns, thrones, principalities, dominions, powers, heavens on heavens, infinite. O madness to the worldling—necessity to the soul fire-touched, fire-stung. Do not speak of heaven till you feel your want of it, otherwise you will speak great words with a faltering tongue, and in their utterance you will spoil their meaning.

Some wonderful sources of consolation Paul opens even in this farewell letter. In the second chapter, ninth verse, he speaks of his "trouble" and of his "bonds"; but he instantly lifts up the subject as he was wont to do, saying, at the close of the verse, "but the word of God is not bound." That is a Pauline expression; doubt the pastoral epistles as to their authenticity who may, every now and then there is a touch of the old master-hand; they are a splendid imitation—so splendid as to be no imitation, but a reality. In the twelfth verse also he lifts up the subject, saying, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." In the thirteenth verse he lays down the sovereign doctrine which redeems the whole situation of life: "He cannot deny himself." That is the ground we occupy. We know that preaching is a failure, we know that sermons often go for nothing, we are perfectly well aware that many appeals die in the air without ever reaching the ears to which they were directed by the ardent speaker; we are perfectly aware of all this—yet "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord," because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. We stand upon the word eternal; we do not rest upon the transient accident. What will

Paul say now to his son in the faith? Surely he will say, "Child, return; I have led thee a weary way; I have spoken words to thee which must have the effect of falsehoods; let my suffering be an example to thee: return to domestic quietude and to natural obscurity." What does the will say? Read the will! We applaud earthly heroes who dying bid men fight; we are proud of them; we call them great men, and we remember their name; we quote what they say and turn it into poetic form and recite it and applaud it:

The war, that for a space did fail,
 Now trebly thundering swelled the gale,
 And—STANLEY! was the cry;—
 A light on Marmion's visage spread,
 And fired his glazing eye:
 With dying hand, above his head
 He shook the fragment of his blade,
 And shouted "Victory!—
 Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!" . . .
 Were the last words of Marmion.

What were Paul's last words—our Marmion? What said he when he was ready to be offered? "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God." And again: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." And again: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." That is the answer to persecution! That is the reply to unbelief! These men are the heroes of the world. It is easier to despise than to imitate them. We shall entitle ourselves to depose them from the throne of influence when we have displayed a bolder courage, a saintlier holiness, and a more perfect sympathy with the sin and the misery of the world.

CVIII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, speak unto us, for thou hast now given unto us the hearing ear and the understanding heart. This is thy holy gift ; this, indeed, is the very miracle of grace. Our faculties are now of use ; we begin to see the purpose of our creation. By thy grace in Christ Jesus, we are enabled to stand in thy light, and to see somewhat of the outline of thy truth. This is a great vision ; for this we bless thee with ardent love. We knew not the great world before ; but now we enter into larger spaces, and enjoy boundless liberties, and feel that we are no longer children of the earth and prisoners of time, but sons of God and born for eternity. So then we are lifted up with great elevation of thought and feeling ; the world in all its littleness is far below us, and the great new sky revealed by thy grace heightens and brightens above us, and we are challenged to arise and take possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. We are no longer little in our thought and bounded in our feeling and hope : we have escaped the chain, we are captives no longer ; we are out in God's boundless firmament, yet are we centred to his eternal throne. The Son has made us free ; therefore are we free indeed. Thou hast shown us the meaning of the letter and led us into the liberty of the spirit. It is a glorious liberty ! We feel its inspiration ; we would answer all its nobleness by larger service and deeper humility. Show us that thou art the Righteous One, tempering judgment with mercy. Thou wilt not overstrain us, for our strength is but weakness ; thou wilt not flash upon us the intolerable glory, but reveal thyself unto us in growing light according to our growing capacity to receive it. God is Love. Thou dost remember that we are dust ; thou wilt not oppress us with burdens grievous to be borne ; thou knowest that our day here is a very short one, and thou hast caused it to be shorter still, by reason of the uncertainty of our possession of it. But we look onward to the other school, where the light is brighter, where the day is nightless, where the teaching is more direct ; in thy light we shall there see light, and growing knowledge shall be growing humility, and growing power shall be growing service. This is our hope, and this our confidence, so that now we are but preparing for the great issue and the grand realisation. Meanwhile, let thy Book be unto us more and more precious, thy Sabbaths filled with a tenderer light, and every opportunity to know thy truth and study thy will more critical and more urgent. May we not reckon as those who have boundless time at their command, but rather as those who are uncertain

of their next pulse, who are expecting the King and must be in readiness to meet him. Thus may we live under high discipline, in the enjoyment of great delight, eager with expectancy, calm with confidence, inspired by hope, yet resting in the completeness of Divine assurance. Thus shall our life be a mystery Divine, a creation of God, an infinite apocalypse. We have come from out-of-the-way places to one home this day. We represent many dwellings, but we cling to the one house which holds us all within its hospitable embrace. This is our Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare, where the servant may become a son and the son receive duly double assurance of his sonship. We would seize the opportunity; we would rise to the inspiration of this new hope; we would dwell within the security of thy Zion and know thy banner over us is Love. Thou hast led us by a strange way: thou hast often disappointed us, but only to enrich us with still brighter hopes; thou hast set mysteries in our families which terrified us because we found no solution of their meaning; thou hast cut the heart in two and made the life sore at every point by reason of the ingratitude of some, the stubbornness and selfishness of others; in some houses thou hast turned the day into night, and afflicted the night with sevenfold darkness. But thou art leading us all the time, chastening us, mellowing us, perfecting our hearts in the riches of thy grace and enriching us with the wealth of thy love. Others are wholly at ease: they have not known the weight of darkness, the sting of disappointment, the bitterness of unspeakable woe; and therein thou hast kept from them the highest joys. They know nothing of heavenly delights, of healing after disease, of joy after sorrow, of the song that comes in the morning which succeeds the long night of waiting. We would not change our places with them; our wounds have been the beginning of health, our distresses have been the roots of our purest joys, our disappointments have led us through crooked and thorny ways right into the light where stands the eternal throne. We will always tarry at the Cross: we can rest only there; we can read all its superscriptions, but high above them all the writing of God—"Behold the Lamb, that taketh away the sins of the world." That is the writing of thine own finger; that is the Gospel of thine own heart. We read it once, and again, and still again, and as we read the light grows and the music increases, and the Lamb descends from the Cross and ascends as Intercessor into the heavens, and begins the infinite prayer of his priestly love. These are the mysteries in which we hide our littleness; these are the doors at which we wait until, opened from within, we be admitted into the inner places, the sanctuary of the heavens. Amen.

AN EPITOME.

TO-DAY we close the Acts of the Apostles. It is not, therefore, a happy day for me. We have lived so long in the company of the great men who fill this sacred portion of the Holy

Scripture that we feel as if called upon to speak a very pathetic and sad farewell. This comes of reverent familiarity with things Divine. We have not allowed the familiarity to descend into frivolity ; but, having kept the sacred line of true friendship all these many days, we feel as if turning our back upon a host of friends whose comradeship we should like to have continued in all its freshness and stimulus until we enter together into the common city which is our home. Thus we leave man after man, church after church, and book after book. We no sooner begin than we end ; our delight is cut off in its ecstasy, and just as our expectation begins to burn into that glad agony which the heart understands, behold, the vision ceases, and we are sent back into shadows and desert places.

Look at the Acts of the Apostles as a whole, supposing the little book to be in your hands in its unity. It is a living thing ; it is like nothing but itself. The Master is not in it visibly, and yet he is throbbing in every line of it influentially. It is a bush that burns. Strange looks we have seen come out of it, and voices above voices and under-voices—marvellous subtleties of tone only to be explained by the Divine and supernatural element. We have studied together the Gospel by Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles ; putting the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles together, what a marvellous reproduction we have of the Pentateuch ! These four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles together constitute the Pentateuch of the New Testament ; and if you will take the Pentateuch of Moses with the Gospel Pentateuch and compare the one with the other, you will be struck with the marvellous analogies and correspondences between the two, which, being duly connected and interpreted, constitute an illustration of what is meant by the Divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. What have we in the second Pentateuch ? How did the first Pentateuch begin ? With creation. How does the second Pentateuch begin ? With creation. What was the first creation ? The moulding of matter, the settlement and distribution of vast spaces and lights and forces. What is the second creation ? A Church, a living universe—men the planets ; souls the burning suns, redeemed lives the great and immortal heavens. The Son is Creator as well as the Father ; yea, the very old creation, the tabernacle of dust and light, the heavens and the earth—these were all made for the

Son, by the Son ; he was before all things as he is above all things, so that in his creation—a spiritual, gracious human creation—he pales the little universe and puts it into its right place—a mere speck upon the infinite being of God. So then we have our New Testament Pentateuch, and we cannot do without it, because it is full of history ; and therein it resembles the first Pentateuch—full of anecdote, story, tragedy, change, movement, colour : a wonderful beginning and the only possible beginning from the highest stand-point, not a beginning in great doctrine, profound philosophies and metaphysics,—all these lie thousands of miles along the road ; no man may fly after them, or plunge into them with heedless impetuosity. We begin with matter, we begin with light and force, with water and earth, with things that fly and things that swim ; and then we pass into the human tragedy, and through all the marvellous evolutions of history, we come into doctrine, philosophy, spiritual thought, the inner meaning, the marvellous music of things. So it is in the New Testament. We begin with a little Child, to what he may grow we know not ; great is his name—Immanuel : God—God with us, the great God, the great Man. Now we must go forward into historical movements, activities, collisions, contradictions ; now we must be lost in the centre of dusty, cloudy battle-fields and then emerge into wide spaces where the summer spreads her banquet, where the air is clear of all but sweetest music. That is God's way of training the individual life. We all begin, so to say, Pentateuchally ; we all have five books, or at least five chapters of history—creation, history, movement, activity, hardly knowing what we are doing—moved, touched, stung, led, and wondering how it will all issue, in what eventuation it will establish itself, and what it will prove when the process has been completed. It enriches one's thought and establishes one's heart in the tender grace of God to see how the lines of life correspond with one another : how things are matched to-day by things that happened yesterday ; how one life is part of some other life, how one nation belongs to all the nations, and to mark how God has not been making detached links without connection or association, but has rather been fastening those links together into a great chain,—a golden chain—the first link fastened to his throne, the chain dropped down, link after link added, and, lo, it begins to rise again at the other end

and comes back, and the links form a chain and the chain a circle and the centre the very throne of God. We cannot do without the historical line. Man must begin with history, he cannot begin with thinking ; man must begin with toys, he cannot begin with ideas, abstract thoughts, and emotions that involve metaphysical mysteries. He must have a garden to work in, he must have a flock to keep, he must have a vineyard to dress ; every night he must tell how the day has been spent ; and thus he is led on into the great service, and into the fidelity that keeps no diary because it is so complete as to be beyond mere registration and beyond that book-keeping which is supposed to guarantee itself against the perfidies of felonious hands. But we must begin with the garden ; man thinks he is doing something when he is tilling a garden. We must begin with objective work, outside work ; it is adapted to us. The absorption, the speechless contemplation, the song without words—these are the after-comings, the marvellous transformations. Meanwhile, keep thy lamp burning, watch thy door with all faithfulness, and attend to thy little garden-plot as if it were the whole of God's universe ; and afterwards thou shalt come to the higher studies, the nobler culture, the richer, deeper peace.

Looking at the Acts of the Apostles as a whole, what a representative book it is ! What varieties of character ; what contradictions ; what miracles of friendship ; what bringing together of things that apparently are without relation and between which cohesion is, from our stand-point, simply impossible ! We have marked the characters as the panorama has passed before us these years ; we wonder how ever they came together, how any one book can hold them ; and yet, as we have wondered, we have seen men settle into relation and complement one another so as to furnish out the whole circle with perfect accuracy of outline. We belong to one another. The hand cannot say to the foot, " I have no need of thee " ; nor can the ear say to the eye, or the eye to the ear, " I have no need of thee." All those men in the moving panorama Apostolic belonged, somehow, to one another, sphered one another out into perfectness of service and endurance. The human race is not one man ; one man is not the human race. The difficulty we have with ourselves and with one another is the difficulty of not perceiving that every one of us is needful

to make up the sum total of God's meaning. Failing to see that, we have what is called "criticism," so that men are remarked upon as being short of this faculty, wanting in that capacity, destitute of such and such qualification, not so rich in mental gift as some other man; and thus we have such foolish talking and pointless criticism. Man is one. God made man, not men; he redeemed man, he became man. Your gift is mine; mine is yours. We are a total, not a fraction; not carping individuals, but one household built on one rock, a living temple raised upon a living Corner-stone. Why fix upon individuals and remark upon their imperfections and their shortcomings? They claim the virtues of their very critics; they leap up in the hands of their vivisectors and say, "Your life is ours; your strength should perfect our weakness." The world will not learn that lesson. The world is lost in selfishness. Christianity is now a game of selfishness, that is to say, resolving itself into "Who can get into heaven? who can safely escape into heaven?"—a question that ought never to be asked; it is the worst and meanest selfishness. Who can fight best, suffer best, give most, do most, wait most patiently?—these are the great questions which, being honestly asked by the soul, ennoble the soul that asks them, and challenge the life to the nobler services which the fancy contemplates. So the men in the Acts of the Apostles belong to one another. Think of Peter and Luke: Peter all fire; Luke quiet, thoughtful, contemplative, musing, taking observations and using them for historical purposes. Think of Paul and Barnabas; think of all the names that are within the record, and see how wondrous is the mosaic. There are only two great leaders. Were I to ask the youngest of my fellow students, now when we are closing the book, whose names occur most frequently in the Acts of the Apostles, hardly a child could hesitate in the reply—"Peter and Paul." They seem to overshadow everybody; their names burn most ardently and lustrously on the whole record. That is quite true; but where would they have been but for those who supported them, held up their arms, made up their following and their companionship? If they are pinnacles, the pinnacle only expresses the solidity and massiveness of the building that is below. You see the pinnacle from afar; but that pinnacle does not exist in itself, by itself, for itself; it is the upgathering of the great

thought, and represents to the farthest-off places the sublime fact that the tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth. To be in the record at all is my ambition ; to be on the first page or on the last, to be anywhere in it, that is the beginning of heaven. This is a representation of the Church of all time. You have your great names and your lesser names ; you have Peter and James and John and Paul, and you have Philip and Thomas and James and Simon and Judas. To be in the list is enough. No man can write his own name in the list. Sometimes it is absolutely essential that a man should make his own signature, do it with his own finger, either in letters or by mark ; his own living hand of flesh must have touched the page. In other records we are written down by consent. We are thankful for the honour of the registration ; we have been invited to form a part of the commonwealth, and we have assented to the proposition. No man can write his name in the Lamb's book of life. Every man must open the door of his heart to admit the knocking Saviour as his Guest. God works ; man works. There is a marvellous commerce between the Divine and the human, the human and the Divine ; the result of that commerce, being happily consummated, is sonship, is liberty, is heaven !

We cannot look at the book as a whole without being struck with its candour. Nothing is kept back ; there is no desire to make men appear better than they really were ; all the sin is here, all the shame, all the virtue, all the honour—everything is set down with an impartial and fearless hand. That is one of the strongest incidental proofs of the inspiration of the whole book. This is not a series of artificial curves or carvings ; the men we have had to deal with are men of flesh and blood like ourselves wholly ; about their humanity we can have no doubt. Here is a record of selfishness: the story of Ananias and Sapphira is not kept back. “ How much better,” some would have said, “ to omit it.” As well omit the story of Adam and Eve. In every book there is an Adam and Eve, if it be a faithful portraiture of human life; in every soul there is an Adam and Eve, a fall, an expulsion, a day of cherubic fire that asserts the sovereignty of outraged righteousness. These are not inventions, but they are representations of ourselves as we know ourselves, and therefore we can confirm the book. The accident varies, the substance is constant ; the

mere outside of color changes in every instance, but the heart is bad with selfishness throughout. Dissensions are reported : Paul and Barnabas separated ; Paul withstood Peter " to the face, because he was to be blamed." Peter to be blamed ! That was an honest book ! There is no man-painting here ; there is no touch of merely exhibitional genius ; there is no attempt to get up a Christian exhibition in the Acts of the Apostles with the motto, " Behold the perfect men !" There is a stern reality about this that compels the attention which it charms. Christianity is not represented here as to its earthly lot in any very attractive way. Who would say, after reading the Acts of the Apostles, were we to judge by the fate of its apostles and teachers, " Let us also be Christians" ? There was not a noble man in the fraternity ; there was hardly a man in the whole brotherhood that could trace his ancestry beyond yesterday. If you wanted to join an unfashionable sect, the Christian sect would have presented to you innumerable and overwhelming advantages ; if you wanted to suffer, Christianity would find the opportunity. It is a record of suffering, misrepresentation, persecution, terrible sorrow and agony ; a record of cold and hunger and thirst and nakedness and night-travelling. The men of the Acts of the Apostles wandered about in deserts and in mountains, in dens and in caves of the earth ; they had no festival, no banner, no music, no honour amongst men. We thought that towards the last surely we should hear some better account of it ; but in the last chapter Christianity is represented as the sect which is everywhere " spoken against." All of these circumstances and instances illustrate the candour, the intense honesty and reality of the record. Human authors study probabilities. It is a canon amongst literary men that even in a romance nothing shall be put down—though it may actually have occurred—which exceeds the bounds of average probability. The circumstance you narrate you may have seen, but you are not allowed by literary criticism to put down anything that is merely phenomenal—so extraordinary as probably not to occur more than once in a thousand years. You must keep to probability if you would build according to technical rules. There is no study of parts, proportions, colours in the Acts of the Apostles ; there is no poetry-making, no romance elaboration ; things are put down every night as they occurred every day—there stands the record,

with all blotches, blemishes, faults, all heroisms and nobilities, all endurances and glorious successes ; nothing is extenuated ; the whole tale is told exactly and literally as it occurred.

Reading the Acts of the Apostles through from beginning to end at one sitting—which is the only right way of reading any book in order to get into the swing of its thought and the music of its rhythm—reading the Acts of the Apostles straight through from the first verse to the last, I feel as if I had been present in a great and busy seed-time. I have come home, as it were, from a great field that has just been sown all over—sown with truth seeds, sown with buried men, sown with buried deeds. The seed thus sown does not look very beautiful. To-morrow it will look like a desert, and for a week or a month there may be no change, but in a week or a month more there will be first the blade ; by-and-by, the ear ; by-and-by, the full corn in the ear ; by-and-by, the flashing sickle in the hand of the angel ; by-and-by, the harvest home ; by-and-by, Christ's contentment—the satisfaction of his soul.

This is the way to judge a book—namely : to judge it in its wholeness ; and this is the way to judge of any Church, or of any institution, or of any man. I must not take your individual actions and attempt to find the whole character in any one conversation, or in any one little sentence ; I must not take you at unawares, and when I see you in high temper say, “ See how bad he is ! ” I must not find you in some act of apparent meanness and judge the whole character by it, saying, “ See the man's dishonourableness ! ” I must not find you in some solitary fault, or under the pressure of some tremendous temptation, and say, “ See in that instance the whole man ! ” Society judges so. Harsh judgments are founded upon little detached instances of temper or of spirit ; but when he comes who made us—made us so marvelously, made no two of us alike—when he comes who knows our ancestry, our birth, our physical constitution, our advantages and disadvantages, our trials and our sorrows ; when he comes who knows us altogether, he will judge us in the totality of our life, and mayhap the worst of us may be recognised by the redeeming Son of God as having upon him the sprinkled blood which will save the life from the destroying stroke.

CIX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are gathered around thy Son in his humblest form, and we wish to hear every word that may be spoken by the voice of his heart. The traitor has gone out, so now we may hear the music of love—the inner word which traitors may not hear. They have gone out into the night to be lost in the darkness they love ; but here we tarry in the morning, in the summer glow, and we are all bending forward to listen to the sweet Gospel voice, full of love, full of hope,—so gentle a voice, hastening, as it were, to its own death to rise again in trumpets and thunders of sovereignty and power. But we will hear its lesser tone, we will listen to the gentler speech ; we will listen with our hearts. Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear ! We are tired of all other voices ; we would purge our ears of all inferior sounds ; and if thou wilt circumcise our ears, we shall hear, and nothing shall escape our adoring and grateful attention. Our hearts need thy voice : they are lone and weary and full of troubling wonder ; yea, they are often sore afraid. They need to hear the voice from the great light, saying, “ Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” The voice is comfort, the call brings with it great strength in every tone, the battle is already won ; whilst our Master speaks to us we rise like men enriched with answered prayer. We love thy tabernacles, thou God of Zion ; our souls have a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord. There we find great liberty ; there we spread out our whole strength—no fold that is not rolled out to its fullest length ; there we eat and drink abundantly ; there the high festival of thy love makes us forget all weight, all burden. We are thine, bought with blood, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, made meet by thy grace to be partakers of the inheritance of life. We would know to whom we belong : we would see thy signature written upon our life, we would feel thy claim in our hearts urging us by sweetest persuasion of love to do some nobler deed. Thou hast led us to despise time and the earth, and all things we can see, when compared with the eternity of heaven and invisible realities. Thou dost train us by our impatience ; our being kept so long outside the door that opens back upon the heavens is itself an education. We knock, and are not answered ; we wait, and there is no reply ; we linger through the night and are wet with heavy dews, still the door is not opened from within ; but we wait, we still continue, we cannot go away ; our standing at heaven’s gate helps us to do earth’s weary work. We have come to make many speeches to thee, because our hearts are many and our his-

tories a great number. Hear the plaint of the sad and those who are ill at ease—disappointed men, vexed and troubled hearts, souls that love right, and wish evermore to walk in the light, and yet are hindered by those who ought to help them ; men of feeble will, whose prayers break right off in the middle and fall down to earth again, who wish to do right and feel as if they could not, who put out their hand to the altar and quickly let it fall ; men who are full of concern about health and business and domestic affairs and success and ability to live honestly in the sight of all men—things will not come right ; if they are put right overnight, they are all wrong in the morning. These men are full of trouble, and they are like to fret themselves to do evil. The Lord have pity upon them and put an end to their vexation, lest it become a stumbling-block over which they fall and never can rise again. Thou dost train us by a way that is often weary. Our eyes are vexed by the prosperity of the wicked ; our souls are full of wonder because they are not in trouble like other men. We cannot understand their fatness, their abundance of gold, and the innumerableness of their cattle ; but thou hast surely set them in slippery places, and presently the tremendous solution will begin. We commit one another to thy care. Draw us closer to thyself ; speak as we are able to bear it ; adapt the light to our vision, and when we would pray, let thy Spirit work mightily within us ; teach the heart great words to express great desires. Qualify us every day for broader service, for more patient suffering, for deeper and more loving obedience ; and when the little flame of life's short day lies down and goes from human eyes quite spark out, may our souls hail thee in heaven's eternal morning ! Amen.

NOT NOW, BUT AFTERWARDS.

“Not now, but afterwards.”—JOHN xiii. 36.

THE whole verse reads thus :—“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou ? Jesus answered him, Whither I go thou canst not follow me now ; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” Children will have everything now : “afterwards” is a word that plagues them. It is a most mocking word : it points to a time that can never come : it may be to-morrow, or next year ; but whether to-morrow or next year, it lies beyond the vision and beyond the range of the little grasping hand. As life advances we become more intimately acquainted with the word “afterwards,” and, indeed, we come to like it. As for time, it is nothing : we begin to touch the meaning of the august expression, “A thousand years are as one day.” We know that nothing is so near as the future ; we know that yesterday is gone beyond

recall, and that to-morrow is always coming and is always available. It is the mystery and the charm of this little life. How throughout the whole of this chapter Jesus Christ is Lord and Master ! The title fills the whole chapter, gives nobleness to all the Divine speeches, covers with tender radiance all the interviews which Jesus Christ conducts on this day of shadows with his wonder-struck and fear-troubled disciples. It is a master's tone delivered with a brother's heart and voice which says, "Not now, but afterwards." This is the second time in the chapter that Jesus Christ has said the same thing to the same man. Simon Peter was never more impatient than within the lines of this chapter. Said he, "What is the meaning of this feet-washing ? I do not know what thou doest" ; and the answer was : "What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter." Then again he comes before us : "Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou ? Jesus answered him, Whither I go thou canst not follow me now ; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." So this child-man was constantly put back and told to wait till the clock struck and the hour had come when he should have the keener vision, the more sensitive heart, the more receptive spirit and understanding mind. This was the training Peter needed : Peter was a man who wanted everything to be done instantaneously ; there must be no waiting ; to-morrow must contrive to push itself into this day, and everything which the impatient heart desired must be supplied the moment the desire was expressed. The Lord, knowing this, always said to him, "Not now," that most vexing and teasing word. We want it now ; we could do well with it now ; it seems to us as if this were the very time to have it ; and when we are in that high blood—mad with impatience—he quietly, with sovereignly tone, says, "Not now." He says it as from a throne, there is no halting or incertitude in his way of saying it ; at first he taught with authority, and not as the scribes, and now, the shadows gathering around him quickly into darkest night, he still speaks with the authority which at first made him conspicuous. This is a grand doctrine ; who can receive it ? We have to be drilled into it ; patience of this kind is not born in us. Blessed be God, we can be chastened and mellowed into the reception of the doctrine that afterwards is greater than now, and that not to have an afterwards

is to be imprisoned and impoverished. Jesus Christ lived in to-morrow ; early in his ministry he said, " Hereafter ye shall see."

Look at this in the direction of revelation. We cannot follow any great Scriptural doctrine now in all the range of its thought, in all the scope of its imagination, in all the possibilities of its issues. Who can explain the Atonement? The angels desire to look into it ; the Voice from above says, " Not now, but afterwards." We begin in the right spirit when we begin in the spirit of waiting. Personally, I accept the Cross, but cannot explain it ; personally, I need the Atonement by a necessity for which there are no words, but which presses upon my heart with all the gnawing agony of hunger. It cannot tell the quality of the blood, the measure of the oblation, the efficacy of the sacrifice. It is called " precious blood," it is called " self-sacrifice " : the words dimly hint to me a meaning very gracious and comforting ; what they imply in all the compass of their thought I know not now, but shall know afterwards. Is there then an afterwards for me, a higher school, a brighter day, additional facilities, closer intercourse with things and spirits and forces Divine? To be assured of that is to know the meaning of the mystery, " Death is abolished."

Or look at the same doctrine in relation to the mysteries of daily providence. " Thou canst not follow me now ; but thou shalt follow me afterwards," the direction not being from one locality to another, from one point of space to another, but a following in thought, purpose, meaning, and sovereign decree—a mighty flying after God, a keeping up *pari passu* with the great Walker, whose way is in the whirlwind and in the cloud. I limp now, halt and stagger and fall and half rise again and am down before I can straighten myself ; I cannot follow, except in the dim, far distance now, but afterward —. We want to know why we were made as we are—so singular, constituted so mysteriously, with a will so easily led, with passions so instantly ignited, with dispositions now rising upwards, now flinging downwards, with a life that seems all forms ; why not have been made otherwise, dear Lord,—with stronger wills, with tenderer hearts, without perversity, without selfishness? And the Voice says, " Not now, but afterwards shalt thou know." This individuality is a heavy burden ; this personal secret of the Almighty, which every man carries in his heart, is a

most tormenting fire. An explanation will help us to bear it. To think that if we had been just otherwise made, in some line or curve of being, with an additional element, with a certain quality that is omitted from our constitution, we should have prayed ourselves into answers and have lifted ourselves by the power of intercession into the temple where there are no clouds, no nights, but where the interviews are face to face with hand locked in hand. We want to know why ; it would comfort us to have some hint of meaning, and the only reply we can elicit is—"Not now, but afterwards." Why this suffering? Who did sin, I or my parents, that this burden is laid upon me—a burden for which I have certainly no light and certainly no strength? But for it, I could fly ; with it, I am buried every day. What a life would yours be but for the one thing that enters the soul like iron ! Old age could never touch you but for one thing. It is that that one thing that takes the erectness out of your figure, and makes your hair white in a night, and ploughs your cheeks into great furrows through which the tear rivers roll. A hundred times have I heard you say, "But for that I could sleep soundly all night, and be cheerful all day ; the eating of bread would be a sacrament and the going out of the house an eager hastening to fight for God and the truth ; why should I have had this chain upon my feet, this manacle upon my hand, this black night shadow bound round my poor eyes? Why?" And the answer is : "Not now, but afterwards." "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

There cannot be an afterwards of revelation unless there is a now of obedience. The now is not evacuated of all meaning, stripped of all urgency, and turned into a blank nothing ; now has its agony, now has its immediate fight. To obey in the darkness is the great thing. Were I to say, "I will trust God in the seventh trouble because he has delivered me in six," I should be saying something hardly worth saying. There is a subtle selfishness in that verbal piety ; there is a most suspicious selfishness about that reasoning, though it sounds so holy. Hear it : "He hath delivered me in six troubles, and in seven he will be with me." The testimony in itself is good, and is sincere, because it is historically true and is meant to be full of solace from the historical

side ; but do not make too much of it as a test of growth in grace. Who then has grown in grace ? This man who says, " Though he slay me, yet will I put my trust in him." That is faith. If you tell me that you have been so reduced, that you know not how to turn, and at the very moment of extremity light appeared and deliverance was wrought out, and therefore you intend to hope even under similar circumstances, your speech within narrow limits is perfectly good ; it is a most valid testimony, but it is no necessary sign of growth in grace. This I want to be able to say : " I have nothing, I know not in what direction to turn, and if nothing should remain nothing, my hymn shall still be sung ; though the fig-tree shall not blossom—I don't say, though there be a late harvest of figs, but though the fig-tree shall not blossom—I will be as pious as ever." That is growing in grace, that is maturity in the life Divine, and that is the lesson which we learn now ; the afterwards is not in that particular lesson : it is the agony, the stinging fire of the immediate moment. How many persons make a deep mistake here ! They think they are pious because, having been delivered out of six troubles, they feel sure they will be delivered out of the seventh. That may be a species of profanity ; on the other hand, it may be the testimony of a grateful heart. But this is piety—to have nothing in the right hand, nothing in the left, nothing in the world, and then not to pray, which is a beggar's attitude, but to sing, which is a child's and a prince's posture. This is the miracle of God ; this is the ideal attainment. We are bound to keep it steadily before our dazzling eyes ; we count not ourselves to have attained : far from it ; but this one thing we do—we press toward the mark. We know our selfishness better than any other men know it, and we mourn it, but seem as if we could not get rid of it ; yet the grace of God is equal to this miracle. So, whilst we pray, we will sing ; and whilst we mourn, we will also hope.

Obedience now is revelation afterward. We shall know if we follow on to know. He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine. Obedience is preparation for revelation. Blessed is that servant who shall be found watching, waiting, when his Lord cometh ; verily, I say unto you, he will put keys into that servant's hand, and call him to honour, and sit him in inner places,

and make a son of him. "Mine, then, is a drudging life." Be it so. "I have to keep beating at this door so—no sign of opening." No matter. "The Lord told me to knock, and here I am knocking, knocking, knocking; I want to fly, but he says, 'Knock'; I want to go inside, and hold festival with the angels, but he tells me to knock." Obedience prepares the mind for revelation, takes out of that revelation the light that would dazzle the spirit's vision, and prepares the heart to receive wider demonstrations of the sovereignty and grace of God. We must be blind three days before we begin to see the outlines of things; we must lie down as blind, helpless creatures, simply and lovingly waiting for any prophet God may send to us to open our eyes and teach us our first lesson in the higher alphabet. This does not suit us: we want to walk more quickly, pass on, because we are measuring time by a false chronometer. We do not know the joy which is laid up for us in complete obedience to the word, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." There is marvellous graciousness in a gradual revelation. If "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," it is because his spiritual education is imaged by that same fair symbol. The next piece of knowledge comes easily. Were the child to be compelled to overleap seven years of the process of education, and to commence a lesson which lies seven years ahead of the page he is reading to-day, he would be overcome with fear, and no strength would be left in him. What the child has to do is to read the next line, and then to turn over the next page. What we, as Christian students, have to do is to keep to the present truth, obey the immediate duty, do the work that lies next and easily to hand; and then the revelation will, so to say, steal upon us, and then encompass us without the violence of haste and without the unrest of surprise. We cannot tell how the light grows in the heavens. In the morning it is seed-time, and at noon-day the harvest fields of the firmament are white with an abundance of result; hardly is the morning seed-time past than the noontide harvest is ripe. So in mental illumination and in spiritual culture and growth. We shall know when we receive our last accession of truth. God's accessions are known by various names—sometimes by the starting up in the mind of a distinct fact; sometimes by the gift of an

impression ; sometimes by the prick of a new impulse ; sometimes by the glow of a new ambition ; sometimes by a mysterious, profound, all-calming peace. But when the accession comes—be it under this name or under that, the great fire, shocks of whirlwind, tumults of thunder, or a still small voice—we shall have no doubt about its identity. Divinity cannot be successfully imitated.

CX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, seeing that we are here but for a little time at the most, help us to number our days ; may we count them, as it were, one by one, and spend each with greatest care, yea, with watchfulness and jealousy lest we mis-spend it, and so waste our little heritage of time. We bless thee the time is now to us but a medium through which we see eternity ; it is no longer a prison, a little space walled in, beyond which we can neither see nor fly : it is a gate which opens upon everlasting duration ; it is preparation-period, it is the hour of school ; we are being fitted for the great service which never is followed by weariness, for the greater study which adds constantly to our richest wisdom. We bless thee that we are here in the name of Christ—the eternal name, the first and the last, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He is our propitiation ; he has made atonement for our sin. We cannot understand his work : we accept it, we adore it, we would be inspired by it ; we fall into thy hands, we ask no explanation but thy love. God is Love. Herein is love : that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It is enough, it is finished ; he hath abolished death, he hath opened heaven. Through the week thou hast travelled with us, often over stony places, and amongst sharp thorns, and through valleys of sudden and great darkness. If thou hast sometimes staggered us with a mighty blow, surely thou hast recovered us with a gentle blessing. Thou hast shaken down the tower of our prosperity and levelled it with the dust ; but thou hast built a nobler tower in our hearts. We bless thee for all thy discipline, though sometimes it cuts us in two ; it destroys our little hope, and turns our midday brightness into great gloom ; still thou art Lord, Father, Giver, Saviour—All. The Lord reigneth. His providences gather themselves up into great shapes, and express themselves in gracious meanings. If we are drawn aside, it is that we may escape danger ; if we suffer, it is that we may be purified ; if we be stripped of things we love and strongly admire, it is that we may be the better clothed with the garments of God ; if we die, it is that we may solve the mystery of immortality. The Lord's will be done, though it be expressed by a rod ; yea, though it sharpen itself into a great sword, two-edged, and fall mightily upon us, still the will of the Lord be done. Our day is short, our grave is already being dug ; yea, our heart-beats are but a few, and, lo, we shall be forgotten. Yet would we hide ourselves in Christ ; we would find a refuge in the Eternal ; we would be established in the faith which holds in its promises all worlds

of light and rest. We give one another to thee ; we stand up, and take hold of hands, every one grasping the other, and we give ourselves to our Father, asking to be guided, upheld, instructed, and comforted by the Lord that bought us with his blood. Thus we shall have rest of soul ; a great quietness shall spread its Sabbath calm over the tumult of our heart ; the wilderness shall be unto us as a green garden, and the desert place shall be full of wheat fields and vineyards. Let the Lord's infinity take into itself our little space ; may the Lord's eternity swallow up our speck of time, and in God's peace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, may we find rest and hope. Amen.

PETER'S VIEW OF CHRIST'S PERSONALITY.

WE have just studied some of the words which were spoken to Peter in the earliest years of his discipleship. In answer to his fretful and almost angry impatience, Jesus Christ said, "Not now, but afterwards." We felt that much could never be made of that man ; we reasoned from his impatience and fretfulness and what seemed to us to be his narrow-mindedness. We did not expect to see him make any figure in the Church, or come to any commanding supremacy of position and influence. We were touched by his ardour ; sometimes we were moved into unwise sympathy with his eagerness to proceed—we, too, were impatient with what we call slowness, not knowing that none is so slow as God, as men count slowness. No sooner did we come into the Acts of the Apostles than Peter became a new man ; this we have seen in one of our earliest studies in that book of church annals. The change was perfectly surprising : the mien was different ; the whole tone was enlarged and enriched, yet softened and chastened into tender graciousness. The impatient disciple had become a solid statesman ; he who was anxious, at one time, to proceed without loss of opportunity called the Church together to stand still a while and hear lessons from heaven. As he preached he became visibly a greater man ; there was more range of mind, greater wealth of language, finer sympathy with spiritual sentiment, a completer yielding to Divine inspiration. So we corrected our views : he was no longer a reed shaken with the wind, but a very prophet of the Lord. Then we lost sight of him : a greater man than he came and filled our horizon, charming our imagination and eliciting from us an enthusiasm kindred to his own ; and now

that the greatest of all the apostles has been beheaded outside the city, we begin to ask ourselves questions regarding his great fore-runner and his great compeer. To-day we open Peter's letters that we may discover, if we can, what his real quality was as a Christian believer, a Christian apostle, a Christian evangelist. The man who was told to wait wrote the letters which are now before us. The swearing, denying, inconstant, repentant Peter wrote these epistles. Has he grown any? Has he added one cubit unto his stature? Has he consolidated his character by grace Divine? The writing is before us; it is in our mother tongue; we represent the education of centuries; we stand here to-day the last results of the evolution of ages: let us bend our cultivated heads over this fisherman's letters and say what he was; let us judge him by a nineteenth-century glory. He was but a rude fisherman, to begin with; a man over whose rudeness you might smile a little, about whose provincialism you might utter excusing words; these are his epistles—two in number—rendered in the English tongue, and we, with all this cultivation round about us and centring in us and depending upon us for transmission to the next generation, will surely be able to form some judgment of the man, his mind, his spiritual quality, and his right to influence the children of all succeeding time. We do not want any man's opinion about the Apostle when we have the Apostle's own writing before us. We can read his character in his sentences; the words he uses are himself—blood drops of his own life. Having the words, what need have we of further witness?

What was Peter's view of Christ's personality? You will find in the second of his epistles, the first chapter and the sixteenth and following verses, his graphic and sublime reply. Speaking when all was apparently done so far as merely historical revelation was concerned; speaking at a very solemn period of his life, when men want to be frank with themselves, he says: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." At first he might have been over-excited by a superstition; the merely romantic element of his mind might have enkindled in presence of certain phenomena which he could neither grasp nor understand; but as the years came and went, and his own cross was already made for him, on which he would be crucified upside down, lest

by adopting the usual method he should appear to emulate his Lord, he said, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." This is the vindication of Christianity : that it grows upon men. At first it is a romance, a heroism, a wonderful thing, a miracle, a surprise that touches certain more or less inflammable sentiment ; but it grows, it increases in fascination, it displays an unsuspected bountifulness in reference to all the necessities and hungerings of life, and at the last it is more than it was at the first, and the delighted guest says to the Host at the head of the table of the universe, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." Young men may leave the Cross, middle-aged men may become too busy to attend to the only things worth attention ; but the elder men grasp with a firmer delight and trust and thankfulness the Cross of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But did Peter hear of this gospel and receive it as a message delivered unto him ? He says, "No." In the sixteenth verse of the first chapter of the second epistle he says, we "were eye-witnesses of his majesty," He begins now to see the true idea of majesty. He began with a very crude conception : he thought of a Prince in Israel, and a throne of ivory, and a sceptre of gold, and redeemed Jews, and nationalised exiles, defeated Romans, Gentiles humbled into abject homage ; but he has grown in his idea of royalty. He now sees through the dusty, faded robe ; he now sees that imperial government, as defined by human statesmanship, was not worthy of a moment's consideration compared with the sovereign rule over human thought and human will held by him who had the right ideas and the right way of touching the inner nature and eternal thought and need of men. This also comes with the years. The child sees no majesty in thought : the young are delighted with spectacular glories, appeals to the eye. It is so with children, it is so with infantile nations, it is so with uncultivated or savage minds. Trace the history in all ages, and you will find first gilt toys, plenty of things, an abundance of furniture, house added to house, things greater than the things before, always trusting to bulk for satisfaction ; but education quietly proceeds, civilisation does its work in the mind, and gradually men drop the little idols which they worshipped, and they come to see how wise was the saying, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." This is the law of growth. When David, the Hebrew poet and

singer, saw the heavens, he was dismayed by them ; the sight grew into an intolerable burden ; he sank beneath the infinite weight. When Peter saw the same heavens—a man who was likely to be struck by bulk and radiance, velocity and force—he, taught in the school of Christ, predicted the noise of their departure and the smoke of their dissolution. Thus we grow from toys to thoughts, from dust to deity. Let us judge ourselves by such standards.

Observe the titles which Peter gives to Christ in these epistles. "Our Lord Jesus Christ,"—that comes in like a refrain until it becomes graciously familiar to our responsive attention. "The Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Peter seems to have invented a new title, and yet Christ can have no new titles, because he was before all things. But "Shepherd" must have had peculiar meaning to Peter, to whom Christ said, "Feed my sheep," "Feed my lambs." We cannot tell how some sentences affect all our after-speech. The colour of a man's eloquence is determined by actions and forces he cannot control. Where is Christ now to the eye of the Apostle Peter? He answers: "On the right hand of God." Jesus Christ, then, was to Peter a distinct personality, a great historical reality, a sublime spiritual sovereignty. He must be the same to us, or we have lost the idea of his incarnation. Who can speak about Christ's work as Peter can? To watch Paul and Peter in their descriptions of the Cross, it is difficult to tell who is first. On another occasion another disciple "outran" Simon Peter; but in this doctrinal race to the Cross, if I may so phrase it, Peter seems actually to outrun the greatest of men. Whether that be so or not, nothing can exceed the spiritual richness, the glorious wealth of language of which Peter avails himself when he comes within sight of the special work of Jesus Christ. He speaks in the very second verse of his first epistle of "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." In the twenty-fourth verse of the second chapter he says, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." In the eighteenth verse of the third chapter of the first epistle he says, "For Christ also hath once suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust." And so on throughout the whole of his epistles; the references are not incidental or brief, but the whole reference is so subtle and so complete that the epistles could have

had no existence without it. This conception of Christ's doctrine of the Cross and Christ's outworking of that doctrine is wrought into the very tissue and substance of the letters. Now, this is what we mean by an inspired man. We cannot define inspiration, but we can sometimes illustrate it. If any one should want a concrete instance of examination, I put in the case of the Apostle Peter. His whole career is before us in the New Testament. Study his words from the moment he begins to babble right up to the Amen of his second epistle, and you will feel what is meant by Divine inspiration. You will see its action upon the mind, its influence upon the heart, its wonderful effect upon the speech which is used for the expression of thought and feeling. This also is what we mean by growth in grace. Who wrote the exhortation, "Grow in grace"? Peter himself wrote it; it is the very last exhortation of his epistles. Having written it, he seems to lay down the pen, having nothing more to say beyond an ascription of honour to his Master. His last verse is his grandest; thus it reads: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." And he is gone. That is what we mean by growth—to come up to this wealth of thought, this steadiness of character, this constancy of obedience, this steadfastness of faith. This is the Peter we heard about when Christ spoke of him in early times. We wondered the Master should make so much of Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." "A 'rock'!" said we—"a pinch of dust, a little powder which a child might scatter." But the Master always took the full view, the complete view, the right view; he said Peter was a rock, and, behold, at the last, who more solid? who broader in the foundations of his character? who more solemn and majestic in his expositions and appeals? If Peter could thus grow in grace, why not we? We seem to have begun much where he began: as working-men, striving for our bread, honestly and honourably; seeking a living in the sight of all men; met by Jesus Christ; a new and strange voice falling into our life and calling us to broader service; a kind of blind and groping following after some one whom we had but dimly seen; light growing; truth clearing itself; work spreading out its claims before us; and now the end visible—away, ay, it may be, on the hill-top, but still

in sight. Have we grown with the growth of this fisherman? Are these great sentences ours? These mountain doctrines, are they the estate and inheritance of our souls? This is no patch of ground which a child might cultivate, but a very universe of spiritual possession. Let us search our souls with this inquiry, for the very searching may have upon us the effect of judgment and, mayhap, the influence of hope.

CXI.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou make thy word a living voice in our hearts, always telling us what to do and encouraging us to do it with all the obedience of love. Let thy word be no longer an appeal to our eyes as written upon the page, but may it dwell in our hearts, rule in our lives, and make us like thyself in the love of truth. We bless thee for the Word that covers our whole life, omitting no point in all the line, though it stretch itself through threescore years and ten and more ; the Word that fills up our necessity, that cheers our whole nature, that recovers our hope and establishes us in the joyous confidence which death itself is unable to shake. Verily, this is the Divine Word : the proof of it is in itself. It comes to us with authority we cannot measure or understand, but also with graciousness and tenderness and sympathy to which our hearts respond because of their own necessity. May thy word, therefore, be unto us an inner voice, a spiritual presence, the very mystery of the mind ; may it be unto us as bread eaten in secret, the very possession of which is not known to the world. May we grow upon it, yea, even unto strength and nobleness and completion, being thy children according to the pattern of Christ, men in the Lord Jesus, perfect and accepted in the Beloved. We bless thee for a life that is full of teaching ; every day is a wide-open book—may we have eyes to see its meaning and hearts to understand its purport. Thou hast given unto us witnesses whose word we cannot dispute ; yea, though by unbelief we challenge thine own Book and the prophets and mighty men of the Scriptures, yet hast thou set in our own heart and in our own life mysteries and wonders and teachers and minstrels, and we are compelled by a persuasion we cannot dissolve to listen to their meaning and their exhortation and appeal. Verily, life is a great multitude ! To live is to be part of an infinite mystery ; to be is to be overwhelmed with burdens too heavy for our strength, and to be dazzled by light which puts out the sun, and to be comforted with solaces greater than all we know of human love. May we rise from the smaller to the greater, from the human to the Divine, from the transient teaching of things which are dying to the eternal monition of things that are in the heavens and for ever abiding. Thus shall we grow in wisdom and grow in grace and grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and leaving childhood and nonage and feebleness behind, our growth shall be towards immortality and heaven and God. For all thou hast done to bless our life, we bless thee in return. Now that we are

gathered around the Cross of Jesus Christ thy Son, we will remember this day how we began, how we have been sustained, how marvellously we have been led, up how many steeps we have climbed, and through what dark and dangerous valleys we have been safely led, often hearing in their very darkest places songs which must have fallen from the skies. Thou hast been with us all the time. Thou hast laid thine hand upon us ; thou hast beset us behind and before. Thou didst rock our cradle ; thou didst teach us our first speeches of love and trust, and our first prayers, the meaning of which we did not understand. Thou hast found friends for us just as we needed them—strong, kind men and women who understood us and came to fill up that which was lacking in us, and to help us in all the waiting and discipline of life. Thou didst send us help in the hour of need : when the gate was bolted and locked and we could neither open it nor climb over it, behold, thou hast melted the iron bars, and we have passed through to victory more and more ; when our strength hast failed, thou didst renew it, and, behold, we were unconscious of the process ; when our fear was deepening into despair, a sudden wind has broken the cloud, and the blue sky has smiled upon us again. If here and there we have halted on the road to dig a grave for hearts we loved, thou hast never allowed Death to come alone into our house, but before him, and behind him, and above him, has been the Resurrection and the Life, so that burial itself became a gracious joy because invested with a subtle and immortal hope. If thou hast brought us along a road very weary and trying every energy, thou hast known better than we did know what was good for us. We look back on the long-gone yesterday of childhood and feebleness and wonder and occasional despair, and we look upon this bright day, a whole firmament full of light, friends on every side, recognition, assistance, sympathy, and all the help of hand and voice and love and prayer, and we say, " This is God's miracle, the very mystery and triumph of love Divine." We have sinned all the way : every day we have sent back to thee with great bars of blackness upon it ; but the blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin ; and sometimes our sins have helped, by reason of the penitence which followed, to enlarge and enrich our prayers. Thou hast brought good out of evil ; thou hast found the darkness and filled it with stars. We commend one another to thee. We would love one another with pure hearts fervently. If one member suffer, we would suffer with him ; if one member rejoice, we would rejoice with the child of joy. Help us to grow in mutual affection, trust, confidence, and comradeship, in Christian service and discipline ; and when the end shall come, may we hardly know which is foremost in the race, which is strongest in the fight, which is purest in aspiration and devotion, because we have gone so well together, so that we are all first, all best, and, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, all saved. Amen.

PETER'S VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

WE have just seen in the last discourse Peter's view of Christ's personality; let us now consider the view which the Apostle Peter formed of the Christian life. There is a marked difference, let me say by way of introduction, between the way in which Peter speaks of himself and the way in which Paul constantly speaks of his own religious history. Paul speaks, indeed, a great deal about himself; he is never afraid or ashamed to tell all the truth about himself which he knows. He recalls the days of his rebellion and stubbornness and blasphemy; the days of his persecution; the black days over which hangs the great cloud of penitence and contrition, but which he always keeps in view as a help to his highest consecration and service. The Apostle Peter, on the other hand, hardly ever refers to himself individually: he joins the crowd, he speaks in the plural number. Now and again he speaks of himself and of his action, but quite incidentally and briefly and, as it were, reluctantly; he says nothing about the bad time of his life. We cannot tell whether any vow was entered into about this or not when he had his interview alone on the shore with the Lord whose heart he crucified. But was ever sin so utterly forgotten, plunged into so deep a depth of forgetfulness? Was it not utterly cast behind the Lord never to be found again any more? Yet, though there is no reference to the sin in particularity, the sin is present in the whole writing of the Apostolic hand; it toned and coloured and accentuated everything. The epistles would have been without their pathos if the Apostle had not fallen into that grievous iniquity. The sin is here; this is the writing of a broken heart put together again by hands Divine, reknit to itself, rebuilt, re-created—a wondrous writing: not literal, not shapely, not mechanical, but a great rush of heart, ennobled now and again by intellectual strokes of the rarest and highest power. The tone is chastened; the whole modulation is ruled by some secret not revealed upon the open page, but known to us who have studied and watched the man.

What was the Apostle Peter's view of the Christian life? Has he a Genesis in his epistle? Yes, a Genesis, a beginning, and a first chapter of Genesis; a creation chapter, not put down me-

chanically and artfully as if by a literary worker, but still there, prominently and unmistakably there, as you will find if you turn to the very first chapter of his epistle and the twenty-third verse. This is the beginning of the Christian life according to Peter : " Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." That is a verse fit, in all that is noblest in conception and utterance, to stand side by side with " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The Apostle did not treat the Christian life as a curiosity in human development, a peculiarity in human education, a singularity in personal temperament ; but, finding the Christian life, he found a creation of God, a spiritual miracle, a marvel that put all other marvels into a secondary position. He speaks of the Apostle Paul having written " some things hard to be understood "—hard, that was, to a man of his particular cast ; but what can be harder than the sentence which he himself has written—" Being born again" ? If we were not familiar with that expression, it would strike us now as it struck Nicodemus when he first heard it ; he rose as if to a new voice, he stood up saying, " What is this ? I never heard it before ; this is most ghostly and startling ; how can it be ? I am amazed, I am lost." " Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." All the mysteries are hidden in that profound revelation concerning the new birth. Unless we keep up to that ideal, we shall be working along wrong lines and mistaken paths. If we regard the Christian life as a new set of notions, views, an attempt at the formation of new habits and the expression of new moral attitudes, we shall have lost all the Divinity and all the inspiration, all the mystery and all the sacred wonder. A new heart is the last of the miracles ; a new life in God is the crowning marvel of his mysteries. Let us never think of it as less than this, or other than this, or we shall fall from the Divine level and have a mystery of darkness in exchange for a mystery of light.

Having thus originated the ideal of the Divine life, what is the great standard by which it is to be measured and adjusted ? You will find the standard in the first epistle, the first chapter, the fifteenth and sixteenth verses : " But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it

is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy." There is no mistake about the ideal. A Divine beginning must be followed by a Divine process and completed by a Divine culmination. The mystery does not end on the side of God : it is to be continued, so to say, upon the human side, so that we ourselves shall be miracles of pureness of thought, loftiness of aspiration, self-sacrifice of life, completeness and joyousness of spiritual obedience. That is the proof of Christianity. Do not ask for proofs in words and paragraphs and massed-up sentences, as if they could perform any wonders of a durable and vital kind. We can only prove Christianity by Christianity ; we can only establish the Divinity of the origin by the Divinity of the subsequent process. We are not to be accounted for ; people are not to be able to explain us, saying, "The reason of his conduct is this, or that." We must have reasons higher than the cloud-line of words, deeper than the loose line of ordinary civil and political action. We must be mysteries, sometimes contradictions, perfect anomalies, apparently upsetting all the rules of wisdom, prudence, and economy as understood by the world ; and we must be content for a while to sow ourselves and to die and to become corrupt, as it were, in the earth, knowing that being sown by the Hand Divine, we shall, in no distant time, stand up a golden harvest, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundredfold. If we are living within the narrow lines of worldly prudence, if we are building a little house of respectability upon the shifting sands of expediency, the very first rough wind will blow us and our house away ; but if we are building a life of faith on the Rock, Christ, it shall be a house too strong for the strong wind, high above the power of the floods—a house built on Divine foundations protected by Divine securities.

This being the origin and this the standard, is all done then ? No : for then comes in the long-continued, critical, unsparing discipline. The discipline you will find indicated in the second chapter of the first epistle : "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speaking. . . . Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles. . . . Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. . . . As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward." And so—the master and the husband and the wife and the child—he throws a great rule of discipline over every member of the body domestic and politic. This is a life of discipline ; " Be sober," says he, " and watch unto prayer." That is a soldier's cry ; that is a military order. " Be sober"—not only abstain from intoxicating drinks, but be self-controlled, perfectly self-ruled ; have yourselves under thorough dominion, have all your senses about you—quick and up, alive ; not to be deceived because the enemy comes in on soft feet, on velvet paws ; he is always there, and if you are to watch keenly, you must watch unto prayer. Surely a memory of the old days is behind all that ; surely the night of cursing, swearing, and repeated denial has to do with this ardent and persuasive writing. No image of the night is given, no dark cloud is detained as a symbol ; but the voice has in it a cry of pain, the exhortation is instinct with a voice that has an explanation. So then we are called to discipline by a man who once lost his own control, but who cried over it in rivers of pure grief. The exhortation comes well from him if we take it well. We might mock him and remind him of incidents in his own life, but that would be a pointless criticism and a cruel and useless reproach so far as we ourselves are concerned. Let him say, " Watch," with a poignancy of tone which can only be feebly mimicked by any man who has not fallen from the tower of vigilance.

Having been Divinely begun, regulated by a supreme ideal, and set under constant discipline, is anything further to be done? Yes : we are told to hold our position intelligently. This we read in the third chapter of the first epistle : " And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." This is not a call to controversy : it is a call to simple intelligence of faith—not accounting for faith, but for the necessity of faith. A very wide difference indeed between the form of the terms—not accounting in controversial detail for our hope, but showing such a conception of our nature as renders it impossible for us at least to do without this hope, because it is the completing touch, the final and all-illuminating glory. It is one thing to sit down to defend the Bible page by page from certain critical and mechanical onslaughts,

and another so to conceive of human life as to find that human life would be incomplete without exactly such a book as the Bible is. So we fall back upon the greater argument. This is not a controversy about detail and particularity, point and incident of an anecdotal kind : this is the testimony of the Christian, that without his Christianity, he would be a man walking in the dark ; without Christian faith, his life would be without its strongest securities ; without Christian hope, his life would be without an outlook ; without spiritual Christianity, he might have an earth, but he would have no sky ; he might light a lamp of his own, but he would not have two great lights above him, the one to rule the day and the other to rule the night. My want of Christianity as a man, a composite, mysterious nature, is my best defence of the Christianity which I have accepted.

But is it all these, then—mysterious in its words, lofty in its ideal, constant in its discipline, intelligent in its tone—and is there nothing more ? Why, the chief thing in the matter of our present human necessity and position is yet to be named, and that is our need of sympathy. We cannot always be on the soldierly strain ; we cannot always live up to the very highest mark of our own conviction ; we cannot always carry ourselves with the lofty port of men who, having just conversed with God, are blind to all things less than infinite. We are human, we are peccable, we have fallen, we may fall again ; we are in the enemy's land, the enemy hot as fire, cruel as hell, watchful with ten thousand eyes that seem never to need the repose of sleep. We must have sympathy. Peter is the man to sympathise with other men. Hear him in the fourth chapter and the twelfth verse : “ Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you : but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

Is there nothing still nearer, still sweeter, still more available to our immediate necessity ? There is, and you will find that in the fifth chapter of the first epistle : “ Casting all your care upon him ; for he careth for you.” That is the word we specially need just now. We all have care : every man carries his own burden, every spirit knows its own wound ; the heart knoweth its own bitterness. Hear the great, sweet, gracious word : “ Casting all your care

upon him"—more still : do not keep any one care for your own carrying ; but go in to him in secret and heap upon his almightiness the burden of your daily care—" for he careth for you." Not because he is almighty, not because it is of no consequence to him how much he carries, for no weight can sustain any relation to infinite power—that would be bad reasoning, and would remove God far from us. The reason is : " for he careth for you." You rest upon his sympathy rather than upon his omnipotence, upon his love rather than upon his almightiness, for (speaking the language of men) omnipotence will fail before love fails ; almightiness will go down under stress of burden before true sympathy gives way. We are lost in language verbally contradictory, to set forth in sacred symbol the everlastingness of the Divine tenderness, the eternity and the infinity of the Divine love.

This is the Apostle Peter's conception of the Christian life. It is not an intellectual wonder only : all this was sustained by work ; it was carried out letter by letter, syllable by syllable ; all this was glorified by sacrifice. The man that wrote this did not write a poem : he worked a poem, he died a poem.

CXII.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we hail thy Son Jesus Christ as the Resurrection and the Life. We do not know the meaning of the words, nor would we know it now. To know the resurrection we must ourselves first experience it. We cling to it as to a hope ; we are sure it means more than our imagination can comprehend ; we leave it as a mystery, we cherish it as an expectation. Life shall overpower death ; the heaven shall rule the earth, and fill it with its own warmth, and cover it with its own body. This is enough for us now to believe. Lord, increase our faith ; make it so great and dominant in us as even now to enable us to mock death and taunt the grave. May we know that death is abolished, that the grave is not a goal, but a halting-place, that the great liberties are beyond the river, that the infinite delights are to come, when our souls are emancipated from the prison of time. If thou wilt put this spirit into us, we shall now be more than conquerors in the wilderness of temptation, in the chamber of suffering, in the solitariness of death. We would now be clothed upon with power from heaven. We pray that in us there may be a spirit full of mystery to the untaught—a great miracle and even stumbling-block to those who have no eyes of the soul and no ears of the understanding, being brutish persons without spiritual sense and holy aptness of mind. Give us the sight that looks into the realities of things, and not the contemptible vision that sees only appearances and accidents and changing chances of things. Open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Thou dost write thy law anew every day ; its meaning is eternal, its applications are as new as our present necessities, its judgments are as new as our latest sins. We bless thee that we love thy Book. We have found thy word, and our souls are eating it as if eating a festival spread by thine own hands. May we devour the bread sent down from heaven with sacred hunger, with a voracity that is itself equal to an answered prayer. Give us penetration of mind that we may see the holy truth ; give us tenderness of heart that we may answer the sacred appeal ; give us the filial spirit that counts obedience the holiest sacrifice and an instant acquiescence in the Divine purpose as the fullest oblation that can be laid upon the altar. With these great thoughts and truths and purposes of thine all in the mind and heart, we cannot be long in sorrow : the passing cloud will overshadow us, but presently there will be a full shining of the light, a return of the blue day, wide as the firmament, glorious as the light Divine. Speak all this most

sweet gospel to hearts that are aching, bleeding, filled with distress, whose hopes are mocked and whose expectations have been turned into disappointments ; give them lifting up for a time ; enable them to see the greater spaces and to feel the breezes of the wider, greener land. Then will they shake off all whinings into the blazing fire and stand unhurt in the place where they were expecting to die. Comfort our poor lives—struggling, fighting, praying, mourning, hoping—quite a wild tumult and contradiction, and rule them into the peace of God. Show us that being in Christ Jesus, we are like fruit waiting for maturity : the sun is shining upon us and the wind is blowing around us ; and that presently we shall be flushed with the colour of ripeness and rich with the juices of maturity and fit for the King's plucking. The Lord help us through the little, cold, grey day of earthly life. It is but for a moment, it ticks itself off quickly in flying minutes, and the steps of them that buried our forefathers are already heard without the door, for they are coming to claim us too, and lay us among the dead living. The Lord make himself felt amongst us by the ardour of our love, by the loftiness of our Christian passion, by the completeness of our spiritual surrender ; and as these results are amongst us like cloven tongues of fire, may we know that this is Christ's great Pentecost. Amen.

1 Corinthians xvi. 8-12.

8. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

9. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

10. Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear : for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.

11. Let no man therefore despise him : but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me : for I look for him with the brethren.

12. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren : but his will was not at all to come at this time ; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

THE MIRACLES OF GOD.

PAUL seems to come within sight in these instructions and suggestions. In the previous chapter he was quite beyond the range of our vision : he was taken up to a great height and there shown things for which there are no proper words. In the fifteenth chapter he is struggling with the thought : he makes the most of the instrument of language, but it is a poor instrument when the soul is in its highest passion and transport. Words must, under such circumstances, be taken as merely symbolical, meaning much

more than they can express, little signs like tiny fingers pointing to the sky. In the sixteenth chapter Paul becomes more like one of ourselves. There is, indeed, a touch of the master's hand even in this postscript chapter ; there is still the heat of the fifteenth chapter in the concluding words—quite a strange glory of meaning, a far-off ghostliness of love and passion and sacrifice ; yet a wonderful humanity and simplicity and healthy thankfulness and recognition of what everybody is and has done in connection with the Apostolic ministry. They are only little sentences after the great thunder-bursts of the resurrection chapter ; they come too soon after that chapter to get their full force and value. If we could read the epistle backwards, we should find that the last chapter makes a very vivid and tender beginning.

These verses constituting the text will show us what Christianity did for the Apostle Paul in so far as his ministry and ministerial spirit are concerned. First of all, it is evident that Christianity made Paul most dauntless under circumstances of an intensely discouraging kind. Thus, in the ninth verse we read : “ For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.” That is a summary of our life : we have not got one step beyond that very point of progress, viz., “ great doors ” and “ many adversaries.” These are the words which illustrate and confirm what we mean by the inspiration of the Scripture. We never get outside the Bible ; we are tethered to it ; we walk around it, but we return to it in all literature, in all high thinking, in all sacrificial and spiritual endeavour after the advancement and sanctification of the race. This is how the Bible proves its inspiration—not by speaking about it, affirming it, and claiming it in some arbitrary way, but by showing us that we cannot get beyond it. The great law of gravitation never speaks to us, never imposes itself upon us by merely arbitrary assertion of superiority or ordination ; but it holds us, keeps us in a grip we cannot shake off—silent, imponderable, mysterious, ceaseless, but its proof is in our inability to escape the range of its influence. So with regard to the Scriptures : we are still within their limits : history has not written a line that is not to be found in the Bible in protoplasm, in first and typical meaning ; romance has not conceived a situation that is not in the parables of Christ by anticipation in a subtle and sometimes merely implied way. The little parables of Christ have been stretched

out by very skilful and ingenious expansion into libraries of imaginative literature ; but all that literature owes itself to the germ Divine. It is so with such sentences as we have now before us. Paul's life is ours ; the life delineated in the Acts of the Apostles and in the epistles is the Christian life of to-day in so far as that life is true to its first ideal and to its sovereign election. Paul looked at the door rather than at the adversaries, and therein the quality of the man is disclosed in a very vivid, yet not ostentatious, way. Why will he "tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost" ? "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." The great soldier must be in the thick of the fight. When the wolf is most dangerous, the shepherd must be most watchful. Paul seemed to have a kind of inborn liking for danger ; it appears as if he preferred to keep on that side of the flock which was most exposed to the attacks of the cruel wolf. Herein he was most Christ-like ; herein he was often alone ; herein he quietly but severely rebukes the most of his successors. What an eye we have for the adversaries ! and therein is our quality revealed. What moaning there is in the ministry ! what complaining there is in the Church ! The neighbourhood is going down ; the population is moving from this point or that to some other position ; trade is in a very unsatisfactory state ; people who are opposed to us are writing more books, publishing and circulating more pamphlets, holding more and more meetings, and getting up more and more agitations ; and we need now to reckon with our foes and make room for them. O degenerate sons of an immortal sire ! There are many adversaries : Paul is perfectly aware of that ; he was not a man who shut his eyes to the enemy and then said there was no enemy. He counted the adversaries one by one, and he said, "They are in a great majority ; humanly speaking, they constitute an overwhelming majority, but Divinely speaking, they are for ever in a minority, for he that is for us is more than they that be against us. Who shall compete with the hosts of God ?" We must take the spiritual view without ignoring the numbers and the abilities that may be arrayed against the Christian cause ; we must take the upper and better, because completer, view, and then we shall see that the great host that is encamped against the Lord is but as a handful of moths which will be crushed and that cannot be thrown away because there is nothing to throw. We certainly

are wanting in dauntlessness to-day. The poor weak Christian of this age is easily damped ; there is no feebler cripple on all the face of the world : a shower of rain frightens him, every noise he hears he mistakes for thunder, and every match that is struck in the darkness he describes as lightning. He is a degenerate type ! He will not have any sensation and what he calls advertisement or display ; his prayer now—dear, feeble creature !—is to be let alone. Do let him alone. The only pity is that there is no cemetery for such dead people, or we would move them off instantly and bury them out of our sight. I want to hear more about the door and less about the adversaries ; I want the Christian Church to magnify the opportunity. Every adversary should be a stimulus to nobler endeavor—a prick in the side causing us to spring forward with more vital alertness and more sacred and complete determination to win the battle of the Lord. We should have said that there being many adversaries was an excellent reason for leaving Ephesus ; Paul made it a substantial reason for remaining there. Surely it is hardly too much to say that a majority of our ministers are now wishing to leave their places because there are many adversaries—not adversaries of the kind referred to by the Apostle, but hindrance, difficulties, awkward people to deal with, untoward circumstances. Brothers, what are we made for, and for what were we inspired and baptized in the threefold Name but to overcome all these things ? If your people are an awkward people to deal with, what a sphere is yours to be envied ! How to be amongst them as a nurse, gently entreating and cheering ! how to act the faithful, loving shepherd ! how to show that prayer is mightier than unbelief, and grace is more lasting in its ministry than human stubbornness ! From a human point of view I sympathise with you. It would suit the flesh to escape certain people and to have nothing more to do with them in time or in eternity ; but hereunto we are not called, but to forbearance and sacrifice and patience and love that will not be overthrown in this holy contest.

The Christianity that made Paul so dauntless made him also paternally and most tenderly considerate. The proof of this is in the action which he took in regard to his son in the faith. His words are full of meaning : “ Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear. . . . Let no man therefore

despise him : but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me : for I look for him with the brethren." What a pleading tone ! What a fatherly protest and challenge to all that was best in the Christian heart ! Timotheus was young in experience, immature perhaps in many ways, not likely to please the people of Corinth on account of this or that accidental peculiarity ; the kind of man that would soon be lost in a little crowd ; a shrinking, modest, gentle thing that would never count for much if tumult were to rule the day ; a sort of man that would rather sit in the corner than stand in the centre. " If he come, see that he may be with you without fear "—receive him with sunshine, be particularly cordial with him ; when you shake hands with him, let him feel the pressure of love in the grip which welcomes him by holy symbol : under encouragement he can do a great deal. If he find you make him an offender for a word : that you are critical, pedantic, a lot of ill-instructed pedagogues yourselves who are proud of finding faults and failures in other people—why, his young heart will just sink down into his shoes, and he will go into some lonely place and cry his very eyes out ; but if you can acknowledge his presence without overpowering him, if you can let him feel the warmth without being dazzled by the light, if you can give him to understand that you have been expecting and that you want to hear him, and that you will mingle your prayers with his expositions and appeals—my word for it, but he is a man ! That is the episcopal spirit ; that is the bishop that can never die ; that is the holy mastery that men will love and kiss and bless as long as the poor human heart needs sympathy and encouragement. To be with the Church without fear—that is to elicit all that is best in the young minister. " The fear of man bringeth a snare." Who has not seen many a young minister struggling under a burden of apprehension or fear ?—not because of the congregation : no minister fears a congregation, but he fears in some cases the particular man in the congregation—the man who has read one book more than the other members have read, and who therefore thinks that he has exhausted the Bodleian library ; the man who has an ear that can detect a false quantity in the utterance of any sentence, and therefore imagines that he is a Beethoven with whom Providence has dealt unkindly. I wish we could bury that man—without doing any injury to him or his family ! The young

minister is made nervous by his presence ; the young minister cannot pray when that man is there ; the young minister, having made one little slip of the tongue in his nervous trepidation, sighs for some subterranean passage by which he may escape the angry or unsympathetic look of that one detestable man. "If Timotheus come"—so young, so seedling-like, so modest—"see that he may be with you without fear." These are the encouragements which show at once the humanity of the writer and the Divinity of his inspiration.

The Christianity that made Paul so dauntless and so considerate made him also the most magnanimous of men. See how this is illustrated in the twelfth verse : "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren : but his will was not at all to come at this time ; but he will come when he shall have convenient time." And who was Apollos ? "An eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures." And of Paul himself what was said ? "His bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible." He knew that, he wrote that, he acknowledged it ; yet he says, "As touching our brother Apollos,"—there is tenderness in the very utterance of the man's name ; he is not "Apollos," but "our brother Apollos," "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures"—"I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren"—that you might hear his eloquence, tremble under his mighty power, and be astounded with gracious wonder at the richness of his Biblical attainments. It is as if Paul had said—"Apollos is but another aspect of myself, and I am but another aspect of Apollos." The ministry is one : we are not a thousand ministers each to be spoken of in his individuality ; if you would hear the ministry of London this day, you must hear some thousand men, and congregating into one unity all their faculties, powers, peculiarities, and distinctivenesses, you would find in that grand consolidation the ministry of Christ in any great city. Yet we are now and then very human : there is perhaps a temptation to persuade Apollos to go in some other direction and so keep out of our particular way. He would make an excellent minister in some city beyond the seas ; he is the kind of man one would be disposed to recommend for the colonies ; we would write no end of beautiful things about him if he would settle two thousand miles away from our particular neighbourhood.

There is a great deal that is human perhaps about us all ; but here we take our stand by our big brother—the greatest of all the apostles. He was better than we are : he did that, he spoke thus for his brother ; he greatly desired the “eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures,” to go with the rest of the brethren, and if he had gone, he would have gone at Paul’s kind and urgent instigation. Do not think of us, but think of Paul. One day we may be almost like him ; we pray to be when the demon of jealousy rises up in our breast : he brings with his rising a great bursting, crying, poignant prayer to heaven that God would kill him with lightning. Do not fix your eyes upon us lesser men, meaner souls, when you see our envies and jealousies and hear how we detract from our brethren and say what excellent men they are “but—,” and what splendid men they would have been “if—,” and what really fine fellows they are in many respects “only—.” Do not look at us, but look at Paul, our chief, *facile princeps*, king of men, he who stands at our head from a human point of view : he said he “greatly desired” the eloquent man of his day to go forward and preach in the city which was the eye of Greece.

I have spoken of courage, considerateness, and magnanimity, and I have ascribed their presence and their energy in the Apostolic character to Divine inspiration. We cannot put these things on from the outside : these are the fruits of the Spirit. All assumed courage is the meanest cowardice, a pretended considerateness is the most objectionable patronage, an affected magnanimity is an hypocrisy which affronts the heavens. We must grow in these graces, but the growth must be from within ; these are not to be taught or learned in the schools : these are the victories of grace ; these are the miracles of God.

APOSTOLIC CONCEPTIONS OF CHRIST.

IN opening the Epistles it will be easy to collate a vast array of passages which seem to put the controversy as to the true meaning of Christ's death to an end for ever. Who can hesitate for a moment after reading such words as these, taken almost at random from various Apostolic writings?—

“ Christ died for the ungodly ; while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us : Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for us. Our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity. He was delivered for our offences. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree. Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

It is easy to pile a huge mountain of proof-texts, and yet to have no Bible. If you could heap the stars together, you would not make a universe of them ; they must be set in their right places and at their proper distances, and be surrounded by their own atmospheres, if you would see anything of the wisdom and power of the Most High. Let me caution you against the unmethodical grouping of proof-texts. You may have a Bible, and yet have no revelation, as you may have a quarry but not a temple. I propose therefore to look into some of the Apostolic arguments in their completeness, and to compare them one with

another for enlargement and confirmation. The order of history determines that the first position must be assigned to Peter ; and if we are to be faithful to our own principle, that to understand a speech we must in some important cases first understand the speaker, we must begin our examination of Peter's speeches and writings with a few explanatory words about Peter himself. It is clear that he had several undeniable qualifications as an Apostolic expositor. He was the oldest of the disciples ; he was invariably present at the great scenes in Christ's life ; through him came the revelation of the Divine Sonship of his Lord ; he had fallen from his first grace, and had been restored after penitence and proof of sincerity ; he was ardent, hopeful, sympathetic. Peter was not a logician, nor an adroit trickster in the use of words, nor a swordsman of remarkable valour and precision. When he swore it was with vehemence ; when he wept it was bitterly. From such a man we may expect distinct recollection of facts, positive expressions of opinion, burning fervour of language, and possibly some confusion in metaphor and argument. I speak thus of him as an ordinary man, not forgetting his spiritual resurrection and the gift of the Holy Ghost which he had received.

It is easy to foresee how such a man will speak after passing through the experiences recorded by the Evangelists. When the disciples are left alone, and are called upon to give an explanation of the wonderful things which have happened, Peter will, as a matter of constitutional necessity, speak as follows : " Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, let me bow my head before you in uttermost shame and confusion. Bad as you may be in this history, I am infinitely worse. You did not know Christ as I did ; I saw his secret life, the beauty that shone at home, the nobleness that became nobler day by day ; I loved him and promised to go with him to prison and to death, but in the hour of trial I denied ever having known him, and I spoke of him as the stranger and the man : but, praised be his name, he spoke to me about my sin ; he broke my heart and healed it again, and this day I own my wickedness with shame unspeakable, yet I renew my hope in the mercy and love of God. Now let me speak to you fully of this whole matter. We now know the blessed secret, and may look for the forgiveness for which Christ prayed on the Cross. Truly you knew not what you did ! I will now

explain everything, and then we shall unite in lofty and glowing ascriptions of praise and honour to him who was despised and rejected of men."

If such a speech as this had been delivered, it would have cleared up every doubt, and brought all who listened to it to unanimous penitence and homage. You must instantly feel that such would have been the happy result. How bold, then, must I be in venturing to suggest that such a speech carries its condemnation on its own face! If the Jews who had resisted the words of Christ, denied the argumentative value of the miracles, and trampled under foot a character against which they could bring no just accusation, could have been persuaded by such a speech, they were not the men they had proved themselves to be. Their retort would have been instant and crushing: "A clumsy piece of peasant-like art! A nice way of putting together the fragments of a shattered cause! We laughed at this man's so-called miracles, we heard and rejected his predictions and his arguments, we killed him on the Cross, being driven off we know not where, and now we are politely asked to make it all up, and to this end we are encouraged by a whimpering hypocrite who seeks our tears through the medium of his own! Boldly attempted but feebly done!" And they would have been right. It is not so that God has ever worked. Artifice, mechanism, or dramatic distribution of parts, there is none in the government of God; there is only life, nature, growth, and struggle ending in victory. Let us see if this be not so in the spoken and written testimony of Peter.

(1.) *The Testimony of Peter's Speeches.*

1. Remember that the Lord Jesus opened the understanding of the disciples that they might understand the Scriptures, and you will at once see how naturally and consistently the Apostle Peter began his ministry. But for that fact we might have been startled by the suddenness with which such a man as Peter, neither philosopher by constitution nor scholar by education, assumed to be an authoritative Biblical expositor. He had no sooner returned from witnessing the ascension of Jesus Christ than he said to the hundred and twenty disciples, "The Scripture must needs have been fulfilled," and in the same first speech he said, "It is written

in the Book of Psalms." Already a noble dignity marked the words of a speaker not famed for prudence, and a noble self-distrust saved him from that obtrusion of his own personality which many circumstances would seem to have justified. Peter did not profess to be an oracle but an expositor, and therein he began well. And as he began, so he continued, for in accounting for pentecostal manifestations he did not give a theory of his own, but at once went to the prophecies of Joel, and sustained himself by two quotations from the Messianic psalms of David. Observe, then, that the ancient books were not thrown away in a frenzy of unintelligent ardour; they were lifted up in honour, and were held to be the foundation of whatever was new in the kingdom about to be set up. Thus Peter unconsciously begets confidence in his ministry; it is not loose or dreamy talk; it has a distinct historical basis, and is meant to conduct to practical and noble conclusions. Personal explanations and personal claims there are none. The common books of the Jews are referred to with precision and applied with authority; and farther back still does Peter go in his great appeal, even to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." In this speech, delivered on the day of Pentecost, Peter (1) reasserted the reality of the miracles and wonders and signs of Jesus of Nazareth; (2) claimed that God himself did every one of them; (3) drove home the charge that the Jews had slain Jesus with wicked hands; (4) preached the resurrection of Christ as a fact attested by many witnesses; and (5) declared, as with exultation and triumph, that God had exalted the crucified Jesus and made him both Lord and Christ. The whole speech of Peter is not given in verbal detail, for it is distinctly stated that "with many other words did he testify and exhort." The probability is, however, that the most important parts of Peter's speech are reported, and that the "many other words" were but in amplification of these points. So much for the speech on the day of Pentecost.

2. The second speech was delivered on the occasion of the making whole of "a certain man lame from his mother's womb." Great tumult, partly joyous, partly controversial, but culminating in great wonder, ensued, and Peter was called upon, either by the circumstances or by direct suggestion, to explain the miracle. In doing this, Peter was careful (1) to disavow all personal merit

or claim in the matter, either on behalf of himself or of John, as though by their own power or holiness they had made this man to walk ; (2) to point out that, as before, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers had glorified his Son Jesus ; (3) to reannounce this same Jesus as the Holy One and the Just and the Prince of life, who, having been rejected in favour of a murderer, was raised from the dead ; (4) and once more to invoke the ancient and unchallenged testimony of Samuel and the prophets, and " the covenant which God made with our fathers." A Jewish speech made to Jewish hearers, yet with a touch of prophecy,—“ Unto you FIRST God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” This speech was made in public ; it remains now to be seen whether Peter will stand to it in a more formal assembly, unsustained by the enthusiasm of a great popular assemblage. He was brought before “ Annas the high-priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high-priest,” and with startling distinctness he reaffirmed the facts, and recited the full style and title of his Master, calling him Jesus, Jesus *Christ*, Jesus Christ of *Nazareth*, Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye *crucified*, and proclaiming him the rejected stone, the head of the corner, and the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The same speech, you see, ennobled by the circumstances, as a mansion may be better displayed upon a mountain than upon a plain.

3. We find in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles that the Jewish rulers were filled with indignation because that by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, and that multitudes of both men and women were added unto the Lord, and sick people were brought into the streets, and laid on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall upon some of them. The indignation of “ the high-priest and all that were with him” led to the imprisonment of the apostles, who, however, were liberated by the angel of the Lord and sent by him to speak in the temple “ all the words of this life.” Called to account for this, Peter had once more an opportunity of reversing his three-fold denial of the Saviour, and what was his use of that opportunity? Observe it. (1) He connected the name of Jesus with the name of God ; (2)

he brought the charge of crucifixion against the rulers of the Jews ; (3) he reaffirmed the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the distinct act of God ; (4) he preached the Divine exaltation of Christ, and proclaimed him a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins ; and (5) he set forth the apostles as the responsible witnesses of these things, as was also the Holy Ghost, " whom God hath given to them that obey him."

4. The concluding evidence supplied by the speeches of Peter as found in the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Peter was sent for to visit Cornelius. The way was prepared on both sides by dreams and visions, as the dawn comes before the glory of noonday. Peter's spiritual outlook was cleared and enlarged, so that he began to see that a man is more than a Jew. This was the second call, almost the second conversion, of Peter. A great speech he then delivered to the representatives of the Gentile world, his points being (1) that God is no respecter of persons, — a common-place to us, but a revelation to a Jew ; (2) that the coming of the Word of God into the world has a clear and simple history, easy of verification ; (3) that Jesus Christ is Lord of all ; (4) that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost ; (5) that the Jews slew Jesus and hanged him on a tree ; (6) that all these things could be attested by " witnesses chosen before of God " ; (7) that the apostles had been commanded of Christ to preach ; and (8) that all the prophets gave witness that through Christ's name, whosoever believeth in him should receive remission of sins. Then came the Gentile pentecost, and the joy of the Lord made the heathen sing.

This is the evidence, analytically stated, of Peter's speeches as reported fragmentarily in the Acts of the Apostles. Upon this evidence four questions, in some form, must be raised in the final argument, and may be set down here to keep the attention fully on the alert : (1) Is there anything in those speeches about the proper deity of Jesus Christ ? (2) Do they contain anything like a formal statement of the doctrine of the Atonement ? (3) Is the word Atonement, or any equivalent of it, used in this testimony from beginning to end ? (4) Is there a single reference or argument in any of those speeches which a good and honest heart can have the slightest difficulty in understanding ? These are inquiries whose bearing and force we must attempt to estimate if we are to

come to sound conclusions as to the work of Christ. That you may not be unduly troubled by their temporary reservation, I may ask you to bear four things in mind : (1) that we have been quoting from *speeches*, imperfectly reported, and not from formal and complete dissertations ; (2) that those speeches were *replies* rather than expositions ; (3) that the replies were given under most exciting *circumstances* ; and (4) that from beginning to end the most decisive and challenging testimony is borne to all the principal *facts* in the earthly history of Jesus Christ. We must now turn from the speeches delivered to excited congregations to epistles written in quietness and with a view to the instruction and comfort of some who were far away. The pen may record what the tongue may have omitted to utter ; at least Peter will have the advantage of being his own reporter and expositor, and of telling calmly all that he knows, or all that admits of explanation by an unlettered but earnest man.

(2.) *The Testimony of Peter's Epistles.*

I open the letters of Peter with the keenest interest, having the most confident expectation that I shall learn from him more than any one else has been able to tell me. He will begin at the beginning ; say how Jesus Christ looked when he called him, what were the first words he heard Christ say in private ; and on from that time he will carry me forward day by day, quoting from every discourse, alluding to every prayer, making a basket of summer flowers out of the tender sayings, the gracious promises, the gentle cautions of his Lord ; he will speak of his own unwise speeches and rash acts, of the maiming of Malchus, and the three denials, and the dinner on the sea-shore. From Peter we shall get the whole story with delicate minuteness of statement and inexpressible tenderness of tone. Coming to Peter with these expectations, you may judge of my surprise when I tell you that in almost every one of them I meet with nothing but utter disappointment ! He gives no history of Christ. From anything I can learn from Peter there might never have been a Bethlehem, a Capernaum, a sermon or a prayer. In reading these letters there are two things made most clear to my mind : the first is that Peter had no notion of writing, that to write a letter was to him a severe difficulty because of his aversion to the mere act of writing. He would speak with

great fulness and power, but write he could not. He seems to put down things as they come into his mind without any attempt at arrangement or order. Hence he speaks of the Crucifixion and of women plaiting their hair, almost in one sentence. In short, Peter was not a literary man, nor, indeed, was John, who was as surprised at the length of his own letters as a child might have been at the length of his first considerable walk. Not the less may Peter have been inspired. Inspiration operates according to the mental compass and general figure of the man who is inspired. The Ganges flows on with noble sweep like a liquid wing; Niagara plunges and roars in an eternal storm: who will deny that the water of both was poured out from the same fountain?

The second point is, that one subject engrossed the thought and love of Peter beyond all others. I do not learn from him that Christ was born, but instantly, in the opening sentence of his first letter, I learn that Christ died. He tells me next to nothing of Christ's eloquence, but he ceases not to tell me of his blood. There is no summary of the miracles, but there is repeated assurance of the resurrection. This is the one subject that fills and rules the mind of Peter, the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the five chapters of his first letter he expressly names the suffering and rising of Christ not fewer than ten times. Every argument is founded upon these facts; these facts are the inspiration of every appeal; and they are the substratum and guarantee of every consolation. The strangers of the dispersion are "sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ"; they are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead"; they are "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"; they are exhorted to suffer patiently, in a manner acceptable with God, "because Christ also suffered for them"; Christ "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," yet "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and by his stripes are we healed; the strangers are to account themselves happy if they suffer for righteousness' sake, "for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust"; they are to arm themselves with the mind of Christ, because "Christ suffered for us in the flesh"; Peter grounds his right to exhort the elders that were amongst the strangers on the ground

that he was "a witness of the sufferings of Christ"; thus their new life in its origin, its discipline, its temper, and its destiny, is related to the blood of Christ in some mysterious but most definite and indispensable way.

The Testimony of Paul.

The Apostle Paul is distinguished from the Apostle Peter by the widest personal differences, and may therefore be expected to give views of Jesus Christ and his work which probably escaped the notice of an unlettered peasant who only saw things in their broadest aspects, and was unaccustomed to the severe analysis either of character or of thought. One cannot but be curious to know how the same set of facts will be regarded by two minds so totally distinct in power and training. Paul had probably never seen Jesus Christ; certainly he had no personal knowledge of him as derived from fellowship or continuous and close observation; nevertheless he would seem to have been as much interested in the New Teacher and his novel doctrines as if he had followed him from town to town throughout his public ministry. The whole thing, Man and Doctrine, excited in Saul the most furious and relentless hostility, not an intellectual hostility merely, but a personal and most practical animosity: he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison (Acts viii. 3); he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (Acts ix. 1); many of the saints did he shut up in prison, and when they were put to death he gave his voice against them; he pursued them oft in every synagogue, and being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts xxvi. 10, 11); beyond measure he persecuted the Church of God and wasted it (Gal. i. 13); he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious (1 Tim. i. 13). One cannot but feel that if such a man had been present at the Crucifixion, some new torture might have been added to the agony of the Sufferer, and some brand of deeper infamy have been burnt into his hated cross. What was absent from Calvary was present in many cities, and what the Lord himself was spared fell in terrible fury upon his followers.

Nor was this persecution the unreflecting and cruel work of a Jew of "the baser sort." Every blow was studied. Every assault

was dictated by a mind of unusual acuteness and culture. The whole campaign of opposition was deliberately and most skilfully planned by a man who "was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee" (Phil. iii. 5); a man who was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts xxiii. 6); who after the most straitest sect of his religion had lived a Pharisee (Acts xxvi. 5), and had been taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God (Acts xxii. 3). No less a king was the Saul who came against the little city of the new faith and besieged it and built great bulwarks against it. That such a man as this should have been converted to the faith which he once attempted to destroy is either one of the most astounding facts in history, or one of the most astounding conceptions in romance. Which it was will appear from the reading of the records of the Acts of the Apostles. If he is less energetic after his supposed conversion than before it, the presumption of its historical truthfulness will be in his disfavour; if he be less than himself, then he will not be himself at all; if he retire into elegant and scholarly seclusion, and meet opposition as cruel as his own with private notes stealthily conveyed to the sufferers whose lot he has adroitly shunned, we may fairly discredit the whole of his Christian pretensions. Elegant and scholarly seclusion! Hear this, and let it balance quotations already made: "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings" (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5). "Are they ministers of Christ? I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. xi. 23-27). In a ministry of this kind the minister will need something more to sustain him than

a few nice metaphysical distinctions, or a number of fine points in criticism, though neither of these will he overlook or undervalue. But where the character is so broad and massive, we expect to find the sources of its sustenance elsewhere than in considerations available only to minds of unusual subtlety and acuteness. Upon no dainty confection can such strength have been nourished, but upon solid and nutritious bread.

The witness before us, then, is a scholar trained under the most illustrious of rabbis (called *Rabban* even by his brethren)—a man of unquestioned social standing ; having a mind of extraordinary force, and moved by an energy almost appalling in inexhaustibleness and intensity : this man has been drawn to Christ, and will now tell us how he views the life and doctrine of his new Master.

1. If we encounter with strong suspicion his sudden appearance as a preacher of the faith which he once destroyed, we shall only do what the early disciples themselves did. That *such* a man should be doing *such* a work is an event which should not be allowed to pass as a mere matter of course. What account, then, will this man (whom we *now* recognise as the most illustrious convert ever made by Christianity) give of himself ? A little suspicion on our part will not be uncharitable. Suppose he should say, " I heard Peter preach a sermon which convinced me of the error of my way." Our instant inquiry would be, " How did you ever bring yourself to listen to a Christian sermon ? For *you* to listen was a miracle only second to your being converted : we are not satisfied ; we do not deny your statement, but we are troubled by it ; we may receive you through our wonder and fear, and may hope the best concerning you, but we cannot yet give you our heart's whole trust and love." Suppose he should say, " I have been thinking much about this new doctrine, and especially about the coming of Christ and his crucifixion, and I have reached the conclusion that I will persecute you no more, but help your cause by publicly avowing and defending it." Our instant inquiry would be, " How did you get the right materials for thinking ? Who supplied you with a true version of the facts, and who guided your meditation upon them ? We do not deny this mental miracle, but we are staggered by it, we are uneasy, we hope the best, and yet our hearts are pained with fear." But suppose he should say, " I was exceedingly mad against you, and armed with

authority and commission from the chief priests, I went to Damascus to seek Christian confessors that I might persecute them ; but at mid-day I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me, and when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest ; and if in this vision he received from the Lord the beginning of the new life, what should we say then ? Instantly we should reply, " This at least introduces a cause equal to the effect ; this is either a great truth or it is a magnificent conception worthy of being true. We will watch your career with the most friendly and hopeful interest : this is verily a case in which the Lord alone could work, as he alone could still the tempest which other voices could never quell. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

2. We follow this up by a distinct inquiry as to the doctrine which Saul was professedly commissioned to teach. He says that Jesus sent him to the Gentiles, " to open their eyes" (is this at all the kind of work which ministers have to do ? It certainly is), " to turn them from darkness to light" (exactly what had been done in Saul's own case), " and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." We are bound to accept this as a clear and forcible summary of Apostolic work, and by so much it confirms all that is personal in the account of his conversion, for this is a kind of confession which comes out of the heart, rather than out of the merely intellectual memory. Did Saul presume at once to preach ? No. He received instruction and comfort, according to his need, from Ananias and the disciples which were at Damascus. Then comes the point with which this inquiry is most concerned, namely, the substance of Saul's teaching, and this is given most clearly in these words : " And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." As he grew in knowledge, and in the comfort and joy of the Holy Ghost, he " witnessed both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come : that CHRIST

SHOULD SUFFER, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." In common with all other Jews, Saul looked for a Christ that should rule and reign, and bring back in heightened splendour all the monarchical glories of the ancient days, but now he was brought to see that the true Christ should suffer—a lesson which the world is slow to learn, not knowing, except in the letter, that the seed which is sown is not quickened except it die. The moment Saul saw that Christ should *suffer*, the light came, the horizon widened, and the old writings burned and gleamed with new meaning and hope. Then he who had seen "a light above the brightness of the sun at mid-day" never ceased to think of the revelation made to his soul as other than light; he called it "marvellous light"; he said, "God hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"; and he spoke in rapture of "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ." Truly the Damascus flame that paled the sun was an eternal illustration of the new heavens that brighten over the soul renewed and sanctified! Jewish pride and hope had dreamed of the coming of One before whose descent the heights should lift up their hands, before the light of whose arrows the sun and moon abode in their habitation, even before the brightness of the gleam of his spear; but here was "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," whom God had allowed to perish on a cross! Such a man might impose upon the ignorant and the fanatical, not upon the scholars of Gamaliel or the choice men of the stock of Israel. But here is the very thing wanted—light, splendour, glory, "the gleam of whose lightning flashes darken the sun and moon," and read in the blaze of this higher mid-day, the prophets and Moses clearly revealed the fact, which lay in darkness before, that CHRIST should SUFFER! Once lay hold of this fact, and the Old Testament is illuminated from end to end, as when the sun is risen it shineth upon all things, showing their elevation and colour.

3. A man who was constantly travelling, and frequently writing to churches to direct them in thought and service, will probably present the doctrine which he thus learned in different lights, and if the various aspects complete each other and they make a harmonious whole, there ought not to be any difficulty in fully under-

standing the Apostolic estimate of Christ's work. We are now in a position to read the testimony of Paul not in a series of disconnected sentences, but distinctly in reference to his own account of the conversion which he professedly received from the Lord Jesus Christ. The sentences themselves will be detached from the immediate context certainly, but only for the purpose of showing whether they confirm and amplify the terms of the original commission. Paul himself has given the test by which his doctrine has to be tried, and by his own test he must lose or gain in this inquiry. Take such quotations as the following : " Jesus Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" ; " Who gave himself for our sins" ; " God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" ; " He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" ; " Having made peace through the blood of his cross" ; " The son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" ; " In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" ; " Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity" ; " Christ died for the ungodly" ; " Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour" ; " Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." These passages, quoted from seven different epistles, are but a specimen of an indefinite number equally clear and decisive upon the point that Christ should SUFFER. So full is Paul's ministry of the sufferings, the death, and resurrection of Christ, as bearing distinctly and exclusively upon the forgiveness of sins, that if you attempt to remove them from his discourses and epistles, you leave literally nothing behind. His language upon the subject is not merely coloured or biassed ; it overflows with the holy theme, and has no existence apart from it : the very speech is made holy by the blood of sprinkling, and is for ever saved from common applications by its consecration to the service of the Cross of Christ.

Let me recall your attention to the precise object of these quotations, if you please. It is not to suggest a theological conclusion ; nor is it to favour either side of a theological controversy ; it is simply to inquire how far they apparently or really agree with the terms of the original commission with which Saul

was professedly entrusted, which, you remember, was "to open the eyes of the Gentiles, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Contrast that call, if you please, with the call of the original disciples, and say whether it sounds like a sentence which a violent persecutor of the Christian faith could have maliciously invented for the purpose of getting the confidence of unsuspecting churches, that he might devour and consume them. "Follow me" was addressed to peasants; *this* call was addressed to a scholar, a philosopher, a man of trained and matured mind: the first was a preliminary and initial call, the second was to the acceptance and ministration of a faith fully revealed, and established for ever as the chief of historical facts and the mightiest of the considerations that move the human will. The very wording of the two calls is an argument in favour of Christianity: Peter was told nothing; Saul was told everything: Peter learned the purpose of Christ little by little; Saul saw it in its completeness, radiant with lustre insufferable! If Saul imagined or invented the terms of his call, it was the most marvellous summary of prophetic and direct Christian teaching ever given; a miracle, indeed, hardly less than the vision itself! Is it not promised by the prophets that when Christ comes, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened," and that he will be given "for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes"? and when Zacharias prophesied in the power of the Holy Ghost, did he not speak of the Highest as he who should "give salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light unto them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death"? And did not Christ himself say, "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"? If you put the whole of these passages together, you will find that Saul caught the whole of them, and condensed them into that pregnant and mighty call which he accepted as the inspiration of his life. Is it likely that such a man would speak much about his Lord? Is it probable that such a call would impart a tone of invincible confidence to his spoken and written testimony? Is it likely that

such a man, under the inspiration of such a call, would rebuke his own pharisaism by familiarity, reverent and tender, with the hated Cross that had wounded his pride and mocked his traditional piety? Has he not many arrears to discharge on this very ground of pharisaic horror of the Cross? Is it likely that he will now try to sanctify the word Cross and to make the word crucifixion a necessary term in all godly speech? Will the Cross be an object to which he will refer as rarely as possible, and that for strictly historical purposes alone? Or will he say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"? Will he declare himself to be "crucified with Christ"?

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

INCIDENTAL TESTIMONY.

NO survey of the Biblical field of evidence can be complete without reference to passages which are full of suggestion as to the function of the Holy Spirit, yet which hardly admit of formal classification. As in the case of Jesus Christ, so in the case of the Holy Ghost, there is a great deal of incidental allusion and illustration, of the utmost importance as bearing upon the argumentative harmony and completeness of the doctrine, yet singularly difficult of effective treatment, and the more so where, as in this case, the exaggeration of details would be fatal to perspective and unity. There is, of course, no one Scriptural book, or section of a book, devoted to a special statement of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; the doctrine permeates the whole field of revelation, here and there, indeed, very broadly, but for the most part in a subtle and assumptive manner, as of power without form. Let us show this by examples :

“ *The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God.*” Are not all the things of God deep, hidden in secrecy and veiled in awfulness? Clearly not. In many places his name is written plainly, and his hand is almost seen; in all goodness, in all pitiful and tender regard for the life of his creatures; in all condescension and healing grace,—a ministry not to be explained in words, yet to be felt with sereneness and joy. On the other hand, there are mysteries which fill life with uneasiness, as if the very earth would break under our feet, and as if enemies beyond number were hovering in the darkness; in our thinking, too, we come to great deeps that have no explanation, and to fierce contrasts which bewilder our moral sense and tempt us towards atheism and madness. Do we not ourselves often do things which we cannot explain to the young, the foolish, the unsympathetic, or the feeble, yet which we know to be right and wise? Have we not the power of hiding

ourselves from the very people who think they know us best, and of concealing our reasons from men who think they comprehend our actions? It was in view of these realities of human consciousness that St. Paul wrote the words before us: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." It is impossible that the existence of spiritual mystery can, as was pointed out in a former chapter, be more explicitly recognised than in the Bible itself. The very book is itself a mystery, and from end to end it cautions its readers against such apprehensions and conclusions as are flattering to human reason. It is the more needful to repeat this even at the risk of tediousness, because it would appear as if some persons were under the impression that by uncommon sagacity on their own part they had discovered that there is something like mystery in the Bible. The Bible says in effect, "I am a mystery; I am a light, touching but a point or two of infinite secrecy; I can give but small satisfaction to Reason, but I can detain Faith in exercise of wonder, expectation, and worship." When we would go into the sanctuary whose door is sealed, the Bible warns us off with the words—"These are the deep things of God." And when we complain of exclusion, it quiets us with the analogy of our own inner life—"What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so——" Thus we are to reason upward from the flutter of our own heart towards the pulsations of the infinite I AM. Yet this pressure upon the sealed sanctuary, when controlled and sanctified, is the inspiration of that hopeful and watchful patience which lingers near the hallowed portals that it may catch the first glimpse of the King.

"*The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*" No man begins life without a spiritual dower,—without sagacity, moral sense, and power of spiritual discrimination and election. *How* it is given to man is a secret, but no greater secret, we repeat, than the beginning of that merely *intellectual* life whose existence is universally acknowledged. At what period does the child become a man in thinking, or is he liberated from the small world of circumstances, and introduced into the illimitable kingdom of philosophy and speculation? Spiritual transi-

tions would seem to be immeasurable as to time, yet what can be more positive as to reality and influence? The Apostle, in making this declaration, is but putting into words one of the chief facts of our own consciousness; that is to say, we *know* that we are controlled by a discriminate and elective power, though we might not be able to express in words its name, origin, and quality, yet when we hear fit words we can claim them and attest their propriety. The "manifestation of the Spirit" spoken of by St. Paul distinguishes human life from all other creaturehood below it. Given a case where a child shall be treated merely as an animal, being deprived of education and of all the ministries of human love, it is not improbable that the child might, in the end, be found speechless and irrational. But if that proves anything, it proves too much. Its application would destroy the most beautiful distinctions in floral life, and turn the healthiest houses into noisome dungeons. But, apart from this, any inference impugning the dignity of human nature which may be drawn from so violent a hypothesis is at once deprived of all value by an inversion of the terms: instead of degrading the child, exalt the animal; put them, as far as possible, under the same influences, give them the same lessons, send them to the same universities, and the argument shall stand or fall by the results. For what purpose "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man" should be carefully observed, *viz.*, *to profit withal*, to profit himself and to profit others, for "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance," and out of that abundance will come an overflow for social benefit. The Spirit dwells with every man, first as an individual illumination, and secondly as a public light—as an *individual* illumination (for in the Greek the emphasis is on *ἐκάστῳ*) and as a public light, that others may be guided and blessed. The passage has been variously rendered by critics, yet every rendering proceeds on the doctrine that each man has his own individual gift of God. Hence—

"*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" The appeal is to those who have received spiritual enlightenment, and not merely intellectual sagacity. It must be borne in mind that every man has the awful power of deciding whether he will be a temple of the Holy Ghost or a syn-

agogue of Satan—as to the mere *fact* of his manhood he is irresponsible, but as to its *uses* he is an accountable steward. Human intellect would seem to be rather the start-point than the completion of human nature. What are we to do with it? Regard it with a contentment which shall degenerate into idolatry, or use it as the organon by which we are to acquaint ourselves with God, and lay hold upon a spiritual inheritance? To create an intellect is to create a will, and to create a will is to impose certain limitations upon the Creator himself. You control your dog by force, you control your child by consent; in the one case you insist, and in the other you reason. So God commands the stars, but he entreats and persuades the hearts of men. Where, therefore, there is an acceptance of the presence and rule of the Holy Ghost, the man has consented to become a temple of God. But is it individual man or collective man that is the subject of St. Paul's inquiry? Clearly both. The individual spirit is regenerated; the individual spirit is sanctified; the individual spirit is renewed in strength and comfort day by day; there can, then, be no violence in carrying the process to its completion, and speaking of the individual heart as the temple of the Holy Ghost. It is true also that the *Church* is the temple and dwelling-place of God, for he loveth Zion, and sets himself in the minds of them that fear him. God speaks to companies of men as he never speaks to solitary watchers and students; there is a fuller tone, an intenser fervour in Pentecostal revelations than in personal communion, and, as we ourselves know, there is a keener joy in sympathy than can be realised even in the devoutest solitude. The argument of the Apostle is more self-consistent and more powerful, and therefore more probable, as an individual appeal than as a charge upon the Church corporate. Still the Church in its plurality and unity has its own special enjoyments; thus:—

“*The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all*”; there is to be a general sense of his presence, and a joyous consciousness of eternal oneness through his holy ministry. A deep and tender sympathy is to hold together in glad consent and willing service “the holy Catholic Church throughout all the world”; and where two or three are assembled in the name of Christ, they are to realise a bond of kinship which death cannot dissolve, and a power

of mutual interpretation which will render mutual misunderstanding impossible. As distance softens the ruggedness of the landscape, so a truly spiritual view of each other throws off into perspective such unevennesses of human character as are merely superficial and temporary. By the power of the Holy Ghost, we see one another in the best light ; a new critical faculty (call it a faculty of verification) is brought into exercise, by which we distinguish, with something like infallible accuracy, between the outward and the inward, between the narrowness and even offensiveness which come through physical infirmity or personal disadvantage and the inward, deep, spiritual love which is the fruit of the Holy Ghost. In a church whose inspiration is deficient, you will find strife, clamour, debate, and alienation ; the members see one another in a false light ; they mistake the meaning of words and the importance of accidents ; they unduly project their own claims and dignities, and thus bring upon themselves penalties and annoyances which might have been escaped. But in a church whose inspiration abounds, you will find confidence, honour, love, patience, and peace like the calm of God. The whole difference lies in the degree of inspiration. It would seem as if men could not, in their natural state, live together without violence. If civilisation be pointed to in disproof of this suggestion, it should be remembered that civilisation is a system of checks and judgments specially arranged with a view to the repression of natural tendencies in the direction of social outrage and misdemeanour, and that that system is so carefully administered as to prevent men showing themselves in their real moral capacity ; that is to say, they live in fear, and are good citizens only because they are timid men. In a truly Christian community, the system of repression and penalty is superseded ; the Church needs no magistracy ; it lives in the fear of God, and is ruled by the communion of the Holy Ghost. But there are disorderly men in the Church ? In the visible body, truly, but not in the invisible fellowship. But good men stumble and err ? Certainly ; and their penitence, their humiliation, is in the proportion of their goodness. And true men fall below their vocation, do they not ? Yes ; and none can know the fact so well as themselves, yet they are pursued and recovered by the ministry of the Holy Ghost in proportion as their love of truth is real. " The communion of the Holy Ghost " is

“with” the Church when the Church is pure, meek, earnest, quiet, patient, and loving ; when the strong bear the infirmities of the weak ; when the moral protest of the Church is resented by the world as keen, cruel, relentless, and intolerable ; when things not seen throw things visible into shadow and contempt. “The communion of the Holy Ghost” is a bond of union which needs no lettered law to determine its function or call attention to its dignity. And this communion is something more than secret and holy love ; something more, too, than rapt contemplation or spiritual absorption : in very deed it is a revelation.

“*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit*” ; not unto me only, but unto us. Of what is the Apostle speaking ? His words are remarkable : “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” So much for the negative side ; with this is contrasted the privilege conferred upon Christian believers : “*God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*” So the Christian sees the world which is invisible to others. The horizon is the prison line of other men, but to the man who is enlightened and ruled by the Holy Ghost it is the door of his Father’s higher kingdom. He has spiritual *foresight* because he has spiritual *insight*. To natural sagacity foresight is but the result of happy conjecture and venture ; but to Christian intuition everything is made plain by the Holy Ghost. John, known pre-eminently by his love, teaches this doctrine in plain words, thus : “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” *Know*, *i.e.*, they have been “revealed by the Spirit.” Heaven is no longer a mystery : its gates and its walls, its rivers and fountains, its thunders and storms of mighty alleluias, its harps and crowns, are made known ; they, truly, are distant, but the heaven of which they are, so to speak, but the accidents, has already sent its light and joy into hearts which have known the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. The Christian who allows himself to be darkened by passing clouds, or to be shut up within the prison of locality, is simply leaving his supreme privilege unclaimed and unexercised. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see God.*”

But have we not gone down in the extent of Divine revelation as compared with the holy men of Old Testament times ? Have

we as close intimacy with the spiritual world as they had? They had dreams and visions and many revelations of angels; the darkness brought with it a light above the brightness of the sun, and solitude was peopled by radiant messengers; their life had a side on which heavenly glories were poured in rich profusion,—a side that caught the morning early, and stretched far away as if to the gate of the kingdom. Where are *our* dreams, our visions of the night, our entertainment of angels, our long detentions in holy solitude? Do we not live in meaner times—do we not starve on the crumbs which fall from the banqueting tables of the elder saints? These questions are all dismissed by one great answer; it is true that in our time the vision has ceased, and that the angel is no more seen, but instead of these preliminary and shadowy revelations, *God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!* Thus we have the sufficing revelation—“Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” Thus, too, we have an indwelling *Spirit* in the place of a transient though dazzling vision. This, it should be observed, is the natural and proper climax of all preceding hints, symbols, and flashes of the hidden world. All these without a fulfilling and crowning SPIRIT would have been signs of weakness, indicating throes and agonies which ended in mere abortions. The better portion has fallen to the latter times. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,” and hath laid aside the awfulness of his incommunicable name that he might be known to us by the tenderer name of *Father*. The value of this revelation will be felt exactly in the measure of our spiritual-mindedness. If we are yet in the flesh, we shall pine for the symbol, the dream, the half-seen, whispering angel, because the carnal mind loves the spectacular, the marvellous, the outward and tangible. But if we are in sympathy with Jesus Christ, we shall see in the gift of the Holy Ghost the fulfilment of the richest promises, and, even from a philosophical point of view, the most rational consummation of God’s elementary spiritual training of mankind. That training, apart from the Holy Ghost, is self-concluding; if continued, it becomes the gloomiest of all monotones—a circle whose revolutions bring repetition, weariness, and disappointment: the dreams come over again, the angels are but angels still, and

thus reverence may drop into familiarity. But, on the other hand, that training, terminating itself in the Holy Ghost, as the dawn terminates in the full light, is a training towards Fatherhood, sonship, and immortal progress. Without Pentecost the Old Testament is an artificial light ; with it the Old Testament is a brightening dawn. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" If so,—
"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." Grieve him not by wishing for another ministry than his own, pining after the revelations given to the infantile world, and otherwise hinting dissatisfaction. He is all gifts in one. Let your love go out towards him in great acts of unquestioning trust, knowing that he is "the Holy Spirit of promise," and consequently that any doubt of his power or grace will shock him as would blasphemy itself. Neither "grieve" him by overt sin. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth"; "neither give place to the devil"; "put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy," "and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." The last exhortation is not thrown in as if it were directed to a mere variety of common sin ; it has a special value of its own—it is subtler and tenderer than any of the others. Not only have we to avoid gross and abominable offences—lying, theft, and corrupt speech—we have to take infinite care lest we grieve the indwelling *Spirit*. Thus, as we have before seen, a severe and most jealous discipline is to be set up in the hidden world of motive, purpose, thought, and unuttered desire. As a delicate bloom requires more care than a rough bark, so a thought calls for keener watchfulness than an action. We grieve society by a *crime*, but we grieve the Spirit by a *wish*. So we may be able to defy social judgment, yet we may be "vexing the Holy Spirit" by a rebellion of which society knows nothing. How terrible, then, in righteousness are the judgments of God, and to how sensitive a discipline are men called in Christ Jesus ! Yet herein is the womanliness of the Divine nature, its infinite grace and pathos, in that it condescends to be *grieved* ! Why not crush the disloyal universe, and set up death upon the ruins of life ? Why be subjected to tears and anguish because of a few creatures who mar the beautifulness of existence ? Let them be stricken down with the sword of anger, O mighty and terrible King ! No : he sees himself in them ; he views them in all the possibilities of his own purpose ; and he suffers the "grief" if haply there may in the long

run come out of it a sweet and imperishable joy. Yet he "will not always strive"; so men are called to care and to penitence, thus :

"*Quench not the Spirit.*" This is not an act complete in itself, simple and final ; it is the last point of a line that may be very long. To *grieve* the Spirit is the first motion towards quenching his inspiration. To hesitate to do that which is right ; to keep back part of the consecrated price ; to modify religious emphasis lest it should irritate worldly contentment—to do these things is to begin to quench the holy fire. To exaggerate the tone of the voice, that the cowardliness of the heart may be disguised ; to brush with more and more effusive care the garment of personal respectability, that the true condition of the spirit may be concealed from men ; to pile with lavish hands mountains of flowers upon the cruel grave of expired affections—to do these things is to depose God from the throne of the soul ! Surely the fire cools lingeringly ; surely it is with infinite reluctance, with inexpressible pain, that God vanishes from the soul of man ! Great doctrines may be taught even in tones of expostulation and warning, as is shown with startling distinctness in this case. The sentence is so brief. It is like a sudden cry. Who could have thought it possible that God could have been worsted by his own child—expelled from that child's holy and loving homage ? When the Apostle said, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," it might have been thought that he had been giving unnecessary caution ; but when he adds, "Quench not the Spirit," the horror of a great darkness seems to come down upon his words. In effect he says, You can insult God, you can mock him, you can set his commands at nought, and banish him from your love and reverence. You cannot touch one of his stars, nor can you silence one of his winds, but you can cruelly wound his heart, and utterly exclude him from your thought. And what can equal the emptiness and desolation of a life from which God has been expelled ! "The last end of that man shall be worse than the first." It is impossible that ever more there can come to such a man the tender hopes and promises of a second spring. "It were better for that man that he had never been born." Yet with respect to other cases a very hopeful word is spoken :—

“*Renewing of the Holy Ghost*,” as if a process of wear and tear took place in spiritual activity, and a counter-process of resuscitation had been established in the Divine economy. Such words seem to convey a lofty challenge, to this effect,—Give, and it shall be given to you in return ; spend and be spent, and at eventide all your strength shall be recruited and increased ; go out bravely into the darkest and roughest parts of the world, and sacrifice yourselves in the spirit of Christ for the salvation of mankind, and be assured that the Spirit will abound with the overflow of your love, and as your day, so shall your strength be. We know what is meant by physical and intellectual renewal. A mountain climb or a journey on the sea may refresh the blood and make us young again ; mental rest, or high companionship of mind, may re-establish our intellectual energy. There is something analogous to this in spiritual exhaustion. When the heart has emptied itself of its Divinest elements for the good of others, it is secretly renewed, and endowed with still higher strength, by the ministry of the Holy Ghost. The athlete says that he is strengthened by exercise ; so the good man is made better by his benevolence ; the philanthropist enriches himself by blessing others ; the liberal soul is made fat, and he who expends most of his spiritual life has most spiritual life to expend, being “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” Out of all this renewal, so constant and so abounding, there comes what is called—

“*Joy in the Holy Ghost*.” The awfulness of his presence, so far as it was merely awfulness, has passed away, and is succeeded by “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” “The fruit of the Spirit is joy.” “The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.” Joy is a state in which all the powers and desires of the soul have been brought to the rhythmic point ; the contentions of logic have ceased, reason has accepted its boundaries with pious grace, hope has seen lights shining afar, and doubling themselves even in the intervening stream of death, and thus heaven has been anticipated in first-fruits and preliminary gladdening and satisfactions. The joy is not in mere facts or histories ; it is not the happiness of momentary surprise ; it is *spiritual* joy, *vital* joy, *joy in the Holy Ghost*. Why distinguish it so specifically ? To show its purity, its duration, and its independence of everything

artificial and accidental. This joy, too, unlike much of what commonly goes for joy, admits of analysis, and of defence on the most obviously rational grounds. It is not a flutter that has no meaning, or a throb that has no moral history behind it. If it be likened to a brilliant pinnacle which the sunlight is goldening into glory, it will be because under the pinnacle there is a solid building, and under the building great foundations of rock. Below this exultant joy lie the main facts of spiritual experience,—the fact of pardon, the fact of regeneration, the fact of adoption, the fact of sonship ; and out of this solid masonry, a temple not made with hands, there rises the pinnacle of joy which flashes brightly and is seen afar. The Christian cannot but be joyous. All the elements that enter into his new personality conspire to make him the freest and gladdest of men.

We have gathered up these points as specimens of many others, without which the more continuous and formal evidence would be incomplete. The marvellous *scope* of the Spirit's work, even as thus imperfectly outlined, cannot have escaped attention. Look at it : he inspires, teaches, guides, leads, comforts, rebukes, helps, prevents ; he enters human life by every line of approach ; he rules human conduct by every motive that can stir the will ; he throws upon human destiny every light that can make it at once solemn and glad. In this way (so profound, so wide) he fulfils every expectation created by the speciality of his mission. Great historical characters have their places and functions well defined ; they begin and they end at points which admit of minute indication ; their influence has an assignable range and value ; even Jesus Christ, in his human and visible revelation, has his Bethlehem and Olivet, his coming and his going amongst men ; but the Holy Ghost penetrates every age and every stratum of life ; he goes before our very thought, and holds his light high above the secret of our heart ; he inspires with gladness, and he shocks the bravest until their knees tremble. His action, like his nature, is mysterious, so sudden, so real, so deeply felt, yet neither to be measured nor expressed in words,—more delicate than thought, tenderer than love, yet mightier than lightning ; present everywhere, yet nowhere visible ; an eternal certainty, yet also an eternal surprise. All this is happily self-consistent, and is precisely what might have been (though with infinite imperfectness) predicated of the conditions.

A happy sense of satisfaction comes with it all. Our sense of the necessary mystery of spiritual life is met, whilst all the pure hungerings and thirstings of the soul are appeased. We feel, as we lay hold of the realities of the doctrine, that the revelation of the person and ministry of the Holy Ghost is given in the best manner, with awfulness yet with familiarity—that the Holy Ghost himself combines the solemn magnificence and independent solitude of the *sun* with all the gracious universality and animating friendliness of light.

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